MY SON

by

CORRA HARRIS

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"THE RECORDING ANGEL," ETC.;
AND IN COLLABORATION WITH FAITH HARRIS LEECH:
"FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN"

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CHAPTER I

YEARS ago I wrote a book about my husband, William Thompson, who was a circuit rider in the Methodist itinerancy. I have read this book myself, not only with interest because it is a literal transcript of our lives, but with wonder in the light of what has happened since, because it contains no reference to the son born to us two years after we entered the itinerancy. Rather, I seem to have been at some pains to omit him from this record. At the time this book was written he did not seem to belong to it. I was still withholding him in my heart from the hardships and sacrifices William and I had made of our lives. I believed he was different, you understand. William was his father, but I always thought of him more particularly as my son. He had my secular nature. The solemn Sabbath of the soul, the awful nearness of Providence and speculations in the kingdom of heaven came into my life under the shadow of William's prayers. My corruption was not originally concerned about putting on incorrup-

tion, and to this day I cannot help worrying a little about being raised merely a spiritual body. The sense I have of my own human reality shrinks from the winged florescence of this idea. I have always been a substantial person, closer kin than William to my dust.

I used to think with secret satisfaction that this son of mine resembled my own father, who could not by any stretch of charity or imagination have been regarded as a pious man, and who even in death only managed to look the noble image of stern Adam clay. But he had a strong character and achieving spirit, with his scenes laid mightily in this present world. From the beginning this boy had the same valor of life in his face, not at all like his own father's, whose countenance was so fine and benignant that one could almost see the wing tracks of angels in the air about his head.

When this child was born William wished to name him after one of the Apostles, preferably John, but I would not have it. He was too much of a John himself in meekness and long suffering. As a wife I was willing to share these attributes with him, but as a mother I had other plans for my son. We finally agreed that he should be called Peter. William, like most gentle saints, loved this repentant fisherman whom the Lord sent to "feed my lambs." But I was satisfied with the name because if there was to be this kind of apostolic succession in the

family I wanted one who could refer back to a militant precedent, and who could and would cut off somebody's ears under proper provocation. The grace of turning the other cheek was a spiritual attainment in which William excelled, and being an ineffably good man he could afford this extravagance in humility; but the way Simon Peter brandished his sword and cut the high priest's servant's ear has always appealed to me more. I know of at least one bishop's ear which I coveted as long as he lived.

I shall pass as briefly as possible over Peter's youth, because this record has to do with the man he became in spite of me.

He was a good baby and never notably good afterward. For a number of years we moved him, along with our few worldly goods, chickens, puppy and commentaries, from one circuit to another without making up our minds about him. I could not be partial to him because there was William, and William could not because there was his God, for whom he was bound to forsake anybody or everybody at a pinch. This situation was entirely agreeable to Peter. If he had a soul at this time he showed no evidence of having one. He was simply a very fat good time quietly from morning until night. If I little animal who walked on his hind legs and had a had a secret sin in those days it was the pleasure

I took in him, because nothing had fallen upon him, neither the fear of the Lord nor the anguish of conscience. He was the emblem of that life which was already passing from me in the shadow of William's prayers. I was becoming a good woman, but Peter was that fleshpot of Egypt which I carried with me through the wilderness. He was my hope in the now of this present world, before that other world to come, toward which I was journeying hand in hand with William.

His father's relations to Peter were characteristic. He was determined to lay the foundation of the gospel in him before any other foundations were laid. Peter's attitude was also characteristic. He was not surprised to learn that God made him. A child never is. They are endowed with an incredible sense of personal magnitude. It is only after one has passed through the diminishing process of becoming a man that he doubts whether he was worth or received such meticulous care from the Almighty.

Peter learned the Ten Commandments with an air of serene detachment. He also learned his father's precious Beatitudes and the Twenty-third Psalm, merely with his tongue. I can see him now, a very short pudgy little boy, standing in the mournful light of William's cavernous eyes reciting Isaac Watts' majestic hymn in childish treble:

When I thurvey the wondrouth Croth
On which the Printh of Glory died,
My richetht gain I count but loth,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

These teachings had no appreciable effect on his conduct. As he grew, thinned in the middle and lengthened in his legs, he showed the usual normal tendencies toward damnation. I do not know what the members of our church thought of him, but I doubt if he redounded any to our glory. He was a good student of books, and had a bad record in behavior at school. He was frank, mischievous and possessed of a militant disposition. He never lied to me, but he was ready to deceive his father when some doubtful deed must be hidden. I suppose this was for the same reason that Adam made specious explanations to the Lord on the day he also performed one of his own deeds. Peter was afraid of his father. My belief is that the moral sense is never born in any of us except through the pangs of transgressions. Peter suffered these pangs to an unusual degree. It is no soft place to be the son of a saint. William was continually snatching him like a little brand from the burning. He snatched him with prayers and with the rod.

When he was about twelve years old, I remember, we were living in a parsonage that had a round table in the dining room. William used to lead Peter,

shrinking, into this room for punishment when the sin he had committed was too flagrant to be wiped out by prayer in the study. I do not know why, unless it was because there was no barn on the place, where boys usually receive paternal castigations. Anyhow, the performance would begin, Peter darting round and round the table, William following after with his coat tails flying, applying the rod at more or less regular intervals.

I had my feelings on these occasions, the only ones I ever had bitterly antagonistic to William and his gospel, so uncompromising, so full of punishments.

When Peter's yells and the swish of the switch became unbearable I used to slip softly to the door, open it the merest crack, thrust my hand through, seize William's coat tail as he passed, give it an authoritative tug from behind, then close the door and walk tremblingly back to my chair in the next room. I cannot say what might have happened if he had failed to heed this hint of maternal providence over my son, but he always did.

"Now, sir," I would hear him say, speaking sternly, "get your Bible and memorize the third and tenth verses of the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah!"

The third reads: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee"; and the tenth one reads terribly: "Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will

he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord."

I do not know how William could remember the verses of the Scriptures so accurately under disturbing circumstances, but he invariably dosed Peter with both kinds.

Then he would go out to make pastoral visits, and no doubt to quiet his nerves, for he was always mournfully upset by these Jehovah séances with Peter. Then my son would slip quietly through the dining-room door and appear before me, standing at a little distance, wishful and indignant, his face tear-stained, still rubbing his shoulders through his thin summer jacket. This was his way of tempting me. But I always resisted, except possibly I may have regarded him with too much tenderness for disciplinary purposes.

"Peter," I would say, "you did wrong. Your father did right to punish you. Now take a bath and get your Bible!"

I always made him take that baptismal bath afterward, because it soothed and cooled his heated body and still hotter temper. And I always saw that he knew the penitential verses before his father returned.

Children are more than intelligent, they are clairvoyant. They know us so much better than we know them. Peter has told me since that he used to watch for my hand to appear through the crack of that

door, and yelled the louder that it might show quickly. He never doubted, he told me, that my sympathies were with him, in spite of my hypocritical support of his father. And I remember saying in reply: "Yes, but your father was always right, Peter!" He looked at me keenly, and laughed.

It is queer how one may still remain faithful to another's ideals, when they never were really one's own. In my heart I was opposed to William's methods of bringing up my son. I had that feeling about Peter. He was mine, the only treasure I had on earth. But I never dared to interfere. We did not discuss the matter, but I was sure that William had secret designs on him. He hoped to make a preacher of him. I watched the development of his plan in silence, Peter was never aware of it. But he was no potter's clay in his father's hands. I trusted the quality of my son. William's methods might keep down the animus in him, but I thanked my heavenly Father that he could not actually call him to preach the gospel.

I was determined to break this entail of the ministry on William's family, he himself being the fourth one in direct succession from father to son, all good men, and faithful. But it is well to keep the dust of your family in good condition, as well as their immortal souls. One or two wrestling Jacobs are enough. If they keep it up one generation after another they develop a sort of spiritual diathesis

which affects the nerves of the body and divorces them mentally from the realities of this present existence. I have heard William tell how when he was a very small boy he used to hide in the mulberry bushes behind his mother's garden to wrestle in prayer. My heart ached for him in the throes of his infantile spiritual struggles. He was born with a prayer on his lips. He lost all the happy transgressions of youth. He was never for one comfortable irresponsible moment of this world. His flesh, his natural instincts and wishes were his crucifixion to the day of his death.

It seemed to me as I considered these things, that I wanted Peter saved—barely saved, you understand—but I was not willing that he should sacrifice the whole of life in this world for salvation in the next one. There must be many saints in heaven who earn their citizenship there with less expense. It was wrong, I know that now, but I took pleasure then in the fact that when Peter wrestled it was with another youth, not anybody's angel. Sometimes when he came in from school with bruises and abrasions on his strong young body I felt strangely lifted. I wanted to sing a song. I went about my work in the kitchen with a lighter step. I could feel the smile on my face at the thought of what was going on in the study at that moment between Peter and his father. I knew that my son was sitting hunched up on his chair, a little secret man savage,

head lowered submissively while William lectured him on the duties of the peacemaker. Peter was no peace producer! And I was glad of it. This business of peacemaking, my masters, I know it to be a perpetual submission to that which is not peace in the other fellow. There have been times in my life when it was infernally hard to bear, the peace that William made and kept.

But I kept right in behind Peter, lest he should reflect too much discredit on his father. He reached the age when every boy wants to stop attending Sunday school. It comes upon them about the time they change from short trousers into long ones. I do not know why unless it is because Sabbath school is associated in their minds with childish things or with the innocuous desuetude of the teachers who so frequently teach them. But I made Peter go, only allowing him a little more margin of time to stand outside the church before he went in. Then he arrived at the period when he wanted to sit in the back seats with the other young roe-buck sinners. But I made him keep on sitting up front. He must have looked good to the congregation, but he was not good, no better than a boy of that age really is.

He passed unscathed through one revival after another when he should have been soundly converted. I do not know if others have observed this, but I believe it is harder for a preacher's son to be born again. They know too much about it. They hear

the brethren talk about revival methods and this or that kind of gospel for stirring up sinners. A good many of their spiritual illusions are destroyed. They must always seek the kingdom of heaven on a cold collar, so to speak, which is the best way, but far more searching. They may join the church, they usually do at an early age, but I have rarely seen one soundly converted in the spiritual stew of a revival where so many people, especially young ones, used to be wildly and enthusiastically converted.

Still, I always made Peter go up for prayers when his father invited penitents to the altar. It would do him no harm to go, but it certainly would reflect on William's ministry if he could not move his own son to show some signs of repentance.

William's health failed when Peter was seventeen. After that he was superannuated and faded away into the Job Scriptures. The one thing he never surrendered of all his hopes was that Peter would be called to the ministry and carry on the work of his fathers in the Lord's vineyard.

Then William passed to his reward. We took him back and buried him in the old Redwine churchyard. A great many sinners and few saints are buried there. It is a cheerful, worldly-minded community, which returns to its dust in singular confidence, as disobedient children have rest and peace in their beds at night. I did not worry about this. I had

the feeling that William would be very much at home in that silent congregation of sinners. This was the way he had spent his whole life.

Peter finished high school in June of that year. It was settled that he should put himself through college. He took the agency for a one-volume encyclopedia. It was printed in diamond type and contained all the available information in the world. I was never able to find anything in it that I really wanted to know, but he said it was there. He had great success with these books. He sold them to people who could not read, and to those who could but would not. He stored more knowledge in this county during three months than a hundred years of schools could have imparted. And I have no doubt that it is all there yet, still inviolate, a thousand musty old volumes scattered in the cupboards and on the shelves of farmhouses, in country stores and college libraries. He had no conscience about selling the thing, and he earned enough money to take him through his freshman year.

He wanted to enter the state university, but William had a good man's suspicions of universities. He said the very name suggested latitudinarianism. He said a man could get such broad views as to unfit him for the wear and tear of life. He said mere culture was not a preservative of the human mind, but a sort of intellectual gilt, which rubbed

off presently and showed something ugly, often vicious beneath. He did not think any man ought to have more knowledge than he could live up to decently and practice with honor among his fellow men. Maybe he was narrow about that, but so are the strongest rays of light that penetrate the uttermost darkness of your insides. So is the steel-tempered wedge that cleaves solid substances. So is the life of every man who achieves his purpose by his own will and works. He must be something of a bigot, hard and invincible at the pointed end of his mind.

The events of the last few years indicate that William's prejudice against some of our universities were justified. The worst things we are experiencing now were taught for more than a quarter of a century in these institutions before the reds and radicals introduced them to the credulous working classes. In those days they were merely flash-light topics of conversation, used by smart people to lighten the tedium of their cultured existence, and your uncultured one. But four years ago, when we experienced the terrific shock of war, and men began to act fiercely and objectively according to the way they thought, it required the ferocious strength of armies, the cold and merciless grasp of commercialism, and the concentrated efforts of all the churches to hold things together against the Setebos doctrines taught by many learned professors.

So I persuaded Peter to enter Eliam College, which is under the control of our church. He might not learn so much, but I thought what he did learn would not be so bad and dangerous to know.

Then I settled down to live on what the conference allowed me each year from the widows-and-orphans fund. Fortunately William had a little insurance, because a widow cannot live on what she receives from this fund, not even if she has lost her appetite and is the kind of widow Paul recommends in the fifth chapter of Timothy: "Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man," he writes Timothy, "well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet," and so forth and so on.

I have nothing against Paul, except the way some elders and bishops copy his authoritative manner and methods, when Paul was overheated or probably not very well, in dealing with their humbler John brethren. But I do think he was harder on these poor widows than he might have been on, say, widowers; not that I ever heard of a widower figuring in the Acts or any other Scriptures. I am not complaining, you understand, I am simply stating my opinion, as Paul did himself sometimes when he admitted that so far as he knew it was not divinely inspired.

I have sometimes thought it might have been better for me if I had married again. I was still a young woman when William died. Then what happened would not have happened to me. But when you have been the wife of a man of God it is not so easy to descend in the scale of things to become the wife of a merchant or even a millionaire. Some of them may have done it, but I never knew or heard of a Methodist preacher's widow who married the second time. I am only admitting that I thought of it long afterward, much as you think of a trip to China which you know you never would or could have taken.

As time passed I began to feel my oats, as the saying goes. I was still doing my Christian deeds, but I was no longer walking so softly before the elders and stewards in my church as I used to walk when they held William's poor little dingy worldly fortunes in the hollow of their hands. Sometimes I used to get up and sail out of church after the services were over when the presiding elder had preached, without telling him I had enjoyed his sermon or that it went straight to my heart, just to know how it felt to be independent like other people. I used to sit in the congregation and enjoy the sensation of not having to worry when prominent members slept through the sermon, because it was not William who was preaching. No one can know who has not had the experience how anxious

a pastor's wife is about everything, from listening to know which of the brethren flatter her husband's prayers with the approval of their amens, to the crucial and desperate concern she feels about whether he will ever be able to get his collections in full.

I rested from all that. I was looking forward to another estate when Peter graduated. He had done exceedingly well. After the first year he made his expenses by tutoring and teaching the summer school at his college. His scholarship was so good that he had been offered the position of adjunct professor of philosophy in this college when he had taken his degree. I anticipated an elegant old age in Peter's house on the campus of Eliam College. I used to entertain myself planning how we should furnish it. When you have lived for so many years in parsonages furnished by committees you do crave the privilege of having your own things and rubbing them and looking at them and possessing them. Peter would have a real library to work in, and I would have flowered curtains at the windows in my bedroom, and a stuffed chair to sit in. I always wanted gay curtains, but committees who furnish parsonages do not indulge in them. And I always wanted an everyday easy-chair. The hard wooden-bottom chairs that prevail in parsonages are durable, but they get to be hard on the very soul of you from having to sit in them so much. I could see myself

in this house or walking through the campus, quietly but genteelly dressed like a good old proverb of a woman, with people telling other people that "the elderly lady who just passed is the mother of Dr. Peter Thompson," and so forth and so on.

You never know what will happen to you. This is why I do not permit myself to be too sure about the kind of place heaven is. The only description we have of it is John's dream on Patmos, when he was old and tired and blind and homesick. Maybe if Paul had had that vision he might have seen a different heaven altogether. Anyway, it is best not to be too sure of your handsome things in this present world if you are a woman. The older I am the more it seems to me that we are merely the attributes of our men. I do not know if suffrage and hypothecated economic independence will make much difference. It only seems a new way we have of being their nearer adjectives. Whenever we make up our minds to do something great and splendid it is always something we do to or for men. We do not seem able to live apart from them, mentally, morally or politically—only spiritually, behind that door, when we lay their case before the Lord and pray for guidance about what next to do with some one of them. And all the time he does the doing. You only screech or picket him or submit to the inevitable. He simply packs you up and takes you along with him when he decides to change

his scenes, either as a duty or a treasure. You may be a home body, but you must travel. You may want to see the world, but you must remain at home and let him be your world. I do not know that it can be said even by those who believe in the doctrine of predestination, that Providence predestines us to our fate. Your husband does it, then maybe you are passed along to your son, and he wigwags you over a way your old tired feet never wished to go. But you must, because that is the way he has chosen for himself. It is something like that, though I do not seem to make it very clear; but if you have streaked it this way and that after one man half a lifetime, and then suddenly, when you were settling down in your own mind and spirit, if you are obliged to get up, turn round and follow another one up and down, you know what I mean.

The blow fell on me like a bolt from a clear sky. This was in May before Peter graduated in June. I always had a short filial letter from him, written on Sunday afternoon. But for two weeks I did not hear from him, then in the middle of the third week came a thick letter. I do not know why, but my heart misgave me as I weighed this bulky package in my hand. Men are never so voluminous as when they have something to excuse or explain.

I went into my room and shut the door before I broke the seal, though there was not a soul in that house but me, and probably my God.

When I had finished reading the letter I laid it on the window sill beside me and folded my hands. It was a warm spring day, but I felt the chill of winter in the air. The sun was shining, but the shades of twenty years gathered and darkened that room. Memories showed their faces in these shadows. I saw William, young and strong in the Lord, starting forth to walk to his appointment to preach on the Redwine circuit, which was our first work. I saw the mountains, bleak and cold, above the house where our first baby had been born dead. I remembered that Gethsemane night.

I saw the old brown altars filled with mourning penitents; I saw the dim faces of so many, many congregations William had served; I remembered the ones of them we had nursed, and the ones we had buried. And it had all been so hard, so barren of every comfort except the comfort of the Holy Spirit, which settled on William, never on me.

Looking back through this pale twilight of memory I knew now when the change came in William, when he really gave up his hopes as a man and ceased to expect better appointments. It was after a certain annual conference when he had been sent back to the same circuit, though he had expected to be moved to a station. He knew it then, but it was years before I realized that he would always be a circuit rider, never have any big church to serve.

The years stretched before me like weary roads on

these circuits. How tired I used to get during the long revival seasons, always having to prepare a table for company, but always attending every service, hoping the penitents would come to the altar when at the end of the sermon William entreated them to come.

The wailing strains of that old hymn he used to give out then filled the room, faint and sad:

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God! I come, I come!

My eyes filled with tears. William used to look so sorrowful when nobody came. Then he would exhort again before we sang the next verse, while I held my breath in suspense, hoping this would move them. And so on it would go until William would say fatally, "Last stanza!" meaning: "You have denied your God, and some of you may be dead and lost before another day!"

Then they would begin to straggle down the aisle—ungainly youths, young girls suddenly serious. Then they crowded, hurrying to the altar, old and young together.

How my heart always lifted at this windfall of mourners beneath William's preaching! I could see him now in memory as I had seen him so many times

lift his hand say, "Let us pray! Brother Rhuebottom, will you lead us in prayer?"

The rustling and scraping of heavy shoes as we went down on our knees! How the rafters seemed to shake above the roll and thunder of Brother Rhuebottom's prayer! He was a "valorous worm" storming the gates of God. He was Jacob wrestling with the pilgrim angel. And he would not let him go without the blessing he craved. Women sobbed, men shouted "Amen!" and the mourners moaned.

These were the only moments of perfect joy I remember in all those years. How could I be happy, I asked myself now, in the spiritual anguish of such scenes. They were terrible, even the souls born out of these travails. They were changed, these men and women who sprang up from these altars. They had a light on their faces. A great experience burned in their eyes.

But how we suffered, pinched and prayed—William all for them, I all for William. Looking back I could see that he never really lived at all, that he spent his life praying for eternal life.

This was the life I had meant that Peter should escape. Peter was to be my own life restored to me.

Tears fell upon my folded hands. I felt like an old clock that has been going too fast which is suddenly turned back years and years.

I reached for his letter. But it was now too dark

to read it. I had been there a long time. The sun had gone down. These were real shadows about me now. But it made no difference, I knew what was in this letter. I should never be able to forget or escape what was in it.

Peter wrote that he had decided to enter the ministry. Stripped of much he said before and much that he wrote afterward, this was the sentence that dimmed my light and set me back years in time.

He had declined the place offered him in the faculty at Eliam for a number of reasons, all written out in full, as a man who takes not so much trouble to convince you as he does to convince himself.

He had been considering the ministry for some time, but he had not mentioned this to me until he was fully settled in his own mind that this was the thing he would do.

He was sure that I would be happy to know of this decision. He had an idea that most good women wanted their sons to become preachers. And though I had remained "generously silent," leaving him free to make his own choice of a profession, he was glad his choice was no doubt an answer to my prayers. He was depending upon me, he went on. He remembered with more and more admiration the way I had helped and sustained his father. We would start again in the itinerancy together, at the bottom, on a circuit, probably the usual hardships for a

time, but he believed he would be able to command good appointments in a very few years, probably the best in the conference. He thought he knew what the people needed now, a gospel that fitted their needs under modern conditions. The church could not afford to lag behind the progress civilization was making. That changed men's minds. The successful preacher had to keep up with them, and go them one better; and so on and so forth.

He had some money left, enough for his purpose. He would come home for a few days after his graduation to see me and receive my blessing. Then he would go to New York for a course of lectures in —— He mentioned the place. It is one of those wide-open theological seminaries. This would be his last chance to do some studying along a special line which he needed, for he expected to join the Conference and take work in the autumn.

Mothers are undoubtedly the most gifted hypocrites in the world to their children. They not only love and cherish them, they play a rôle, they recite the lines that belong to that rôle, which may not be dictated by their hearts or their own convictions, but by the circumstances in which they bring up their children. So it had been with me. As William's wife, Peter's mother was forced to keep him in the shadow of the church with solemn admonitions, when always I hoped and longed for him to escape into the world of deeds done by men, not

saints. And now he imagined I should be thankful because he was about to enter the ministry!

It was his father who prayed as long as he lived that Peter might be called to preach the gospel. Even at that I was not so sure William's prayers had been answered.

I rose, lighted the lamp and read Peter's letter again. I missed that strange egotism of humility peculiar to men who have been "called" to preach the gospel. William had it. I was always afraid he would be called as a missionary to the uttermost parts of the earth. But Peter wrote that he had "decided to enter the ministry." And he had his eye already fixed on the "best appointments in the Conference."

Wrestling with angels is nothing to wrestling with your own heart, especially when you have grown old and tired and your heart has grown strong in one desire. I passed through hours of struggle that night, alone in my house. I did not want Peter to enter the ministry. A terrible weariness fell upon me at the thought of going back over those hard years. It was not that I no longer believed in the kingdom of heaven, but that I did believe in it. I had settled down comfortably in my faith. I dreaded to be stirred up again, for other people's sins, made anxious day and night about the affairs of the church. I had been William's amen, so to speak, for so many years. And nothing had come

of it for just me, but an awful, unnatural virtuousness, a sacrificial piety, and the death of William.

If it came to the pinch I doubt if any man or woman would choose to live the same life over again, however well he had lived it. He might for that reason choose one quite different. It may be a fearful thing to admit, but I wanted now, even in my approaching age, some of the natural willful sweetness of just living, of being responsible to the Lord only for my personal sins, not for the brethren or the sistren. Heaven knows I never wanted to be so good a woman as I had to be as William's wife. How many times I had been tempted to speak the truth to stewards in our church or at the woman's missionary meeting, that would have skinned somebody alive for meanness, when I had to say something meek and forbearing for William's sake. What a relief it would have been just to tear round sometimes regardless of my soul's salvation, or any other soul's salvation. But I never did. I was waiting for Peter to grow up, win a place in the world and open the door of this prison for me.

Now here he was about to close it in my face forever. You do not know how much you desire something until you are about to lose it. I suffered. And I could not do as I always did in the years of my submission, get the Bible and find some Scripture to comfort me. If you are not meek it is

no use to read your Bible. What is in you is not in it.

I sat there in my old gray dress with my old gray head leaning against the back of the chair, with my eyes closed to hold the tears.

There was another reason why I did not want Peter to be a preacher. Thirty years ago, when William and I were young, the best men mentally and spiritually entered the ministry. They had great virtues and great gifts. They had dignity and influence. They insipred reverence. And many of them became national figures in the church of God. Now, we all know it is too often the seconds who enter the ministry, ordinary men whose sacred offices do not exalt or change their quality. They frequently became prominent, but they do not become great. Their eloquence is like any other eloquence. Their hearts do not burn, their lips have not been touched with the holy fire. They lack some awful quality of the spirit which the old preachers had and which they have not. It is not for me to judge them, but I have wondered if they did not lack the courage of that sublime thing which we call faith. They have been tamed by something which is not the Holy Ghost. The young preacher may be a dull honest man or he may be a sensationalist, but he does not speak the same things nor with the same authority preachers of an elder day had. The very

pulpit where these men stood has been effaced. It is becoming more and more of a rostrum.

For the first time in my life I looked askance at my son. Never before had he measured himself in my thoughts beside his father. I had counted his cubits by another standard. And now I found him undersize. What was this presumption that possessed him? How could he dare so much? What was the matter with the world that a smart young man could "decide to enter the ministry" much as he would decide to practice law, and look forward shrewdly to the "best appointments."

I thought I would write Peter exactly what was in my mind. I would search him and warn him.

Then I fell to trembling at the fear of what I was about to do. Who was I to question him? After all, my son had delivered himself into the hands of the Lord. The Lord would chasten him and tear him down and build him up according to his word and his Spirit. That was the end of the struggle. I knew it when I began to weep. Then I went over to the table and wrote him the kind of letter the mother of a young preacher should write. I told him that I would go with him and help him and stand by him so long as I had the strength for this business. All I asked of him was that he would pray without ceasing that he might be a true disciple and become as much as God would give him grace to be like his father, who had literally believed in

"the way, the truth and the life," and had preached it, counting himself as nothing that he might serve his Lord.

I am a Protestant as much as I can be anything, but I am not always orthodox in secret. Sometimes my heart, the heart that loved and believed in William, will put messages in my prayers to him, when I should pray only to my Heavenly Father. It was so on this night when at last I came to my knees. I know I started out right, asking God to have mercy upon me, and to create within me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me, because he knew I needed it; and to give me courage and strength to live again within the hollow of his hand. It was no use to ask forgiveness for wishing a little life apart, for I knew I should never cease to regret and wish for the world. I merely made a silent footnote here in my mind for him to see—namely, that he had made this world, filled it and blessed it. For what, if not for his children to love it and crave it? But when it came to Peter I found myself talking to William in that prayer. I wanted him to be with Peter as much as he could under the circumstances. If he had any influence in heaven I wanted him to see that strong angels guided Peter's footsteps, because I was very uneasy about him.

Peter came home in June. He was in high spirits, a ruddy, handsome young man with the sparkle of a fine intelligence in his strong black eyes. I could

see that he had a well-seasoned mind, and the use of it, but he did not look like a man upon whom the mantle of a prophet had fallen. I missed that high secret assurance the call of God gives, not easily named, but to be found in Scriptures like this: "Thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the Lord thy God."

I had been through these places with William, without partaking of his great assurance, but I had felt these waters, these fires; I had watched him on his mountain top, and I had been very near him in the valley of shadows many times. Everything had happened to me except that my cup had never run over, and my head had never been anointed with oil. And it did not seem to me that Peter had any sense of these experiences through which he must pass. I was determined again to search him.

I wanted to ask him a few questions that the brethren do not ask a young man when they grant him a license to preach the gospel. But this was not so easy to do. He was very affectionate, ready to talk about whatever concerned just me, his mother, but I could not pin him down in any spiritual corner of a conversation.

Finally it dawned upon me that he understood

and was purposely evading the issue. His manner implied that his idea of the ministry was different, possibly beyond me. He kept off the subject as men do when they keep their women out of their business affairs. Maybe he thought I was too old to face the issues a minister must meet now.

But there was one test that he could not evade. I gave it. We had been sitting on the porch in the moonlight talking round and round in an ever-widening circle. I went in, lit the lamp and called Peter. I called him much in the tone I used to call him when it was time for him to wash his feet, say his prayers and go to bed.

He came in blinking at the light for a moment and looking across inquiringly at me as he sat down beside the table.

I took my little Bible from the window sill, where I keep it, and handed it to him.

"Lead us in prayer, Peter," I said.

I may be mistaken, but I thought he hesitated for the briefest moment. Then he took the book, opened it at random and read a few verses. Then we knelt and Peter prayed—a sort of intellectual brickmason's prayer to his Heavenly Father, if you know what I mean; the words of a good workman who meant to do his duty and make things go. I will say that there was vim and confidence in this prayer and not the faintest taint of self-righteousness, nor even of humility.

The next evening in a little silence that occurred between us I reached out quite unexpectedly and took Peter unawares.

"My son," I said, "you do not know what is before you. You are the fifth man in direct succession in your family who has given up the world and chosen the cross for his portion."

Peter stirred, leaned back in his chair and made no reply.

"The first one was converted under John Wesley during the first revival he held in this country. They were all good men, but your father was the best. He was a holy man, Peter. His footsteps are before you."

"Father was good, the best man I ever knew," he answered after a pause; "but he was not a successful preacher."

"Many were converted under his ministry," I answered quietly.

"Those emotional experiences, they did count then; but now, mother, everything is different. You must try to understand that. Religion is a development——"

"Religion is a great experience," I interrupted.

"It is now past the emotional, primitive stage, and is becoming a creative force in the world. It is reaching people, getting some sense into their heads about how to think and keep clean and live

healthily in their minds and bodies. That is the best use to make of it."

This sounded blasphemous to me, but I held my peace.

"It is all there, in the Scriptures, if we will only learn to use it, not shout it," he went on. "But we, the preachers, must meet the people halfway. We have been too far removed from them and their practical everyday needs."

No such place as "halfway" is mentioned in the gospels for a priest to meet his people, but I did not say anything.

"You remember Snitkins?" Peter began again after a pause.

Yes, I told him. I was not likely to forget Snitkins. He was a steward in the last church William served; a large yellow-bearded tomcat of a man who made money, ruled the town and wanted to rule the church. He complained of William's sermons, said he couldn't keep awake. He thought that church needed a younger man for pastor. I always thought he had something to do with William's being superannuated at the next Conference.

"Father did not know how to manage Snitkins, that's what I mean," Peter said.

"It is not clear to me yet, what you mean, Peter," I returned.

"He wanted to be prominent, that was Snitkins' nature. Father should have appointed him super-

intendent of the Sunday school. He wanted to be. Then he might have made a showing that would have helped the reports from that church. See my point?"

"I see it, but your father would never have made it," I returned.

He said he did not want me to think he failed to appreciate the wonderful grace and goodness of his father, but he was trying to show how necessary it was now to use all means to further the interests of the church.

"Father was a mystic," he added.

And he went on showing me, talking well and very shrewdly, and I must say like a man with a good conscience.

I gathered that he thought William depended too much on the leadings of the Spirit, and that he, Peter, was by that as some liberal-minded Christian Scientists are about administering a dose of medicine to a man who does not believe in this doctrine and cannot be cured by faith of his ailment. He was for getting results, whether you were in the spirit or out of it.

We had no more talk along this line, and he went away the next day, to be gone until Conference met in November.

The one comfort I had was that he was not a hypocrite. He was in earnest about calling him-

self to the ministry and about being a good business man of the gospel. But I felt very queer about facing the saints on those old backwoods circuits with Peter in this fix.

CHAPTER II

In November of his graduation year Peter joined the Conference and received his first appointment. He was sent to Brasstown, a small place in the mountains, far north of the church equator of this state. This was not a circuit, but what is known as a half station. Besides the church at Brasstown he would serve one other, five miles distant in the country, known as the Suetally Chapel. This was encouraging, for the rule is to try out a young preacher on one of the hardest circuits, many of them consisting of six churches.

I was very busy while he was at Conference, selling the things I had accumulated during the last four years and getting ready to move. When my trunks were packed I had nothing extra except my onion buttons and a few garden seed. I had my doubts about Peter as a pastor, and no matter what happened if we had a good garden we could pull through. This was a sort of private collection William and I used always to take from the earth, to insure us against those misfortunes which overtake the children of God when their daily bread depends upon the good will of their stewards and the Quarterly Conference.

Nothing remained to be done when Peter returned from the Conference except to pack his father's books. The trunks were in the hall, and one large black tin box. This box contained the strongest and most cherishable sermons of four generations of preachers in the Thompson family. They dated back to a certain discourse by the Rev. Henry Thompson, who had been a terribly ungodly man until he was converted at Savannah under John Wesley and received the call to preach, but did not get one of Mr. Wesley's teaspoons. I do not know how it happened, but there are a lot of these teaspoons handed down in Methodist families, which are said to have descended directly from John Wesley. And it always sounded queer to me, presenting newborn souls with souvenir spoons. If I should ever meet this great apostle of Methodism in the next world I may make some discreet inquiries of him about this. You cannot approve of everything a good man does, but if he was rewarding his converts openly, what I want to know is why Henry Thompson did not get one of these spoons. He was soundly converted. He became a great preacher and seems never to have forgotten the narrow escape he had from damnation. He appears always to have preached with a coal of fire in his mouth. The text of this old sermon was, "The soul that sinneth, it shall surely die." And it was a brimstone master-

piece of the gospel. There were also many of William's best sermons in this box.

After we had discussed the news every preacher always brings back from a meeting of the annual Conference, and Peter had delivered messages from some of the elder brethren who entered the itinerancy years ago when William did, we went into the hall to consider our baggage, which must be shipped at once to Brasstown.

Peter stood with his hands in his pockets regarding three old itinerating trunks, the ribs of them bulging, their sides battered and the tops crank-sided, grinning a little, but securely roped and tied. He said he doubted if they would make the trip.

"Oh, yes, they will. They are used to it," I assured him.

He recognized the tin box. From the time he could remember he must have seen this box going before us to the next appointment.

"Still keeping those old sermons," he said, smiling.

"Yes, they are the Enoch records of men who walked with God," I answered, nettled by something in the tone of his voice.

We went back into the living room, where he began to examine William's books. He bent over, wrinkled his fine nose and doubled up the wrinkles on his smooth young brow at these old ragged vol-

umes with their bindings torn and their loose leaves sticking out here and there.

"Mother, these books are all out of date," he said.

I regarded him. The eye may speak to a man even when he has his back turned to you. My son felt something poignant laid on him from behind. He stood up, glanced at me sidewise, ran his fingers across the backs of Kitto's Commentaries, which filled one shelf.

"Now, these are perfectly useless," he told me.

"Peter——" I began.

"There is not a single volume in this collection worth the cost of packing and shipping," he finished in spite of my trying to say something.

"Peter," I began again, giving him an eye for an eye this time, "I do not know what is in these books. I never did know. But your father knew. He said that they were a great help and inspiration to him. And where I go, they are going!"

"Oh, well, if you feel so about it, we must take them, of course," he answered in the manner of a man who humors, merely humors a woman.

So we took them, and every time we moved to another appointment we carried them and the old battered tin box. Peter shed his own modern books on the Scriptures frequently, as if his spirit molted theologically like a chicken. But I kept right in behind him with all those thunderous old commentaries from which William had obtained the

stern and majestic obscurities of his preaching style.

We arrived in Brasstown much as preacher folk always do. And I was too busy for a time to know how Peter was performing his offices as a pastor.

The Methodist parsonage has changed less in the last twenty years than the Methodist Church. The effect of the religious mind on parsonage furniture is, I believe, far more permanent than it is on human character. This may be because the human is never quite reduced to the mere grimness of it. Even a saint flares sometimes and lets in a rosy light on his morals. But the parsonage is hopelessly submissive to anything your sternest Christian imagination can do it, which is also a frugal imagination. The insides of it never minister to anything but the sacrificial instincts of its victims. The one at Brasstown was very severe. But it was clean. Sister Stone, who was chairman of the reception committee which met us the day we came, called my attention to this fact.

"You see, it is clean," she said when we returned to the parlor after we had finished checking up the list of all the parsonage things.

"Yes, everything is beautifully clean," I agreed cordially.

She was regarding me authoritatively over the top of her spectacles. The other women of this commit-

tee were regarding me like a determined cloud of witnesses.

"Six of us spent two days getting this house in order," Sister Stone went on.

"You did!" I exclaimed, lifting my face and blinking admiration at them through my glasses. You may always look pleasanter through your glasses than you can over the top of them.

"And I hope such a task will never be laid upon us again. Our last pastor's wife was not a good housekeeper," she said.

I made a sad little sound through my nose in memory of their last pastor's wife, and let it go at that, though I could have made a few searching remarks.

It is true that some preachers' wives are not good housekeepers, but it is not a singular fact, nor peculiar to them. Other women fall short of this perfection with less excuse. They do not do their own work or nurse their own children. On their busiest day and in addition to everything else, they are not obliged to dust and wipe off their husbands, as the pastor's wife must do, lest he show a human grease spot on the lapel of his coat in the pulpit. Then she must make sure the poor absent-minded soul, being in the spirit on this Lord's Day, has a clean handkerchief in his pocket with which to wipe his brow when he warms up in the course of his sermon. She must also get the children off to Sun-

day school. She must prepare dinner, and get ready for church, and be there in her accustomed place before the first hymn is sung.

Multiply these activities by the fifty-two Sabbaths in the year. Double that to count the Sunday-night services. Add all the Wednesday-night prayer meetings, and you receive some idea of what the day of rest means to a preacher's wife, even if there is no quarterly meeting with the presiding elder on her hands. There is also the revival season of six weeks in the hottest part of the summer, and all the company incident to that, with the youngest baby getting his teeth and keeping her up at night. For the infants in preachers' families always do cut their hardest teeth during the revival season. I never knew a single exception, no matter if he was due according to Nature to have produced them during the previous month of January. Even the grace of God cannot give such a woman the time and physical strength to be a good housekeeper.

I have sometimes wished in my bitterer moments that the Lord would even it up to Methodist preachers' wives in the next world by giving them special committee privileges to investigate the housekeeping records of prominent church women who know so much and tell so much about how we kept their parsonages in this one.

After Sister Stone and her cohorts took their leave I unpacked and put my things in place. Then I sat

down to have a good cry. This was a sort of baptismal habit with me in the old days. Whenever we moved to a new work I used to take a little time off to weep and rock myself and soothe my feelings, which were always secretly suffering from the change. But now I could not work myself up to the point of tears. I felt queer and cold and strangely removed from these old griefs and associations. Maybe it was my age and Peter's youth, but I did not feel so near and kin to pastoral things.

On the following Sunday morning I heard Peter preach for the first time. It was the usual little village tombstone of a church, this one in Brasstown, very white outside, dark and sadly toned inside, as a grave must be after you have lain in it a long time.

I have not seen much in my life, only the plain things. My eyes have not been cultivated by the splendors of this present world. I have never seen a great statue or a great painting. But I have often wondered what the world which has seen all these things would think about the picture of a Sunday-morning congregation somewhere on a Methodist preacher's circuit, which has been painted by a really great artist. It would be like painting the Beatitudes. Rows upon rows of candlelit faces in the brown gloom, with such a plain altar in front of them, this one looking so meek; that one blessed

from having mourned; this old saint wearing his seeing-God look from having been so long pure in heart.

No matter what these people have done during the week, they drop that secular and carnal expression, they are now innocent of themselves. It is very touching. You may scarcely distinguish the worst of them from the best of them. The man seated there at the end of the bench whose very hair snarls, whose face is marked with so many lines of human frightfulness, seems now in this shadowy peace only to have been weather-beaten by exposure in some harsh windy corner of life. The evil in him shows for what evil really is, a sort of ugly pathos. This woman on the other side of the aisle, who is a termagant in her own house, wears an air of repose, as if for this hour she has been eased from the worry and flurry of doing her duty, right or wrong. The veriest gossip of them all looks like an elderly handmaiden of the Lord ready to fall upon her knees and wash the feet of the saints. And the others, the plain script of the congregation, are so submissive, so completely at rest from themselves and from their neighbors.

This is not hypocrisy, it is the church; the effect of its silence and the association of ideas for which it stands in the minds of these people.

I came early that morning because I wanted to have a look at Peter's flock, and form some idea of

the sort of men and women with whom he would have to deal. I knew that somewhere among these tired old lambs there would be the usual difficult brethren, known to each other but not to the new pastor. I have inspected too many congregations in my day not to recognize them almost by sight. And I have seen a hundred like the one inside the doors of that church—the same red-hot stoves down near the front, the same little glass pitcher and tumbler on the right-hand side of the pulpit. I chose a seat as usual at the end of one of the amen sections, not to be too close to the saints nor too far from the sinners to see what was going on without turning my head inquisitively.

I saw my son for the first time sitting in a pulpit. Only his head was visible above the top of the altar. No doubt he had said his priest prayer before I came in. I know of no other act of worship which is so definitely and almost shockingly performed at the expense of the congregation as this private personal pulpit prayer of the Methodist itinerant preacher. He enters this sacred place, and with his back to the congregation he drops upon his knees, both of them, bends his body to a right angle, covers his face with his hands, and, with his long coat tails artlessly parted behind, he makes his prayer to Almighty God to sustain him and give him courage to preach the word with power to these people behind him. It is the one moment in his life when he publicly outranks

his congregation by holding a sort of official council with his Lord in which they are merely the topic under discussion.

I settled down and spread out my skirts, adjusted my glasses and caught sight of Brother Stone at the end of the same bench in the darkest corner of the amen section. I whispered him one of those discreet nods you offer in the prayerful atmosphere of a church. He returned it. Then he seized his long white beard as if it were the apron of his face, held it back, took a sort of hissing aim at the little sand box and expectorated, meaning that it was nearly time to sing the opening hymn.

I have noticed this, that the fiercer male saints frequently use tobacco, while the vacillating, hair-hung and breeze-shaken saint is almost sure to be an abstemious man, who must backslide before he can indulge in the use of tobacco, or even coffee. Therefore, the fields of spiritual battles are always strewn with these wounded who must be restored to a state of mild ecstasism before they can possibly believe that they are right with their Lord.

I had already recognized Brother Stone as one of the fiercer saints who would never backslide or even during a revival admit that he needed a "deeper work of grace." He was a standpatter in the Lord's vineyard, and usually kept one foot on his pastor's neck. I knew that his relation to Peter would be strictly doctrinal, and I wondered how he was going to man-

age Peter, or if it was possible that Peter might manage him. This was a maternal flight of imagination. In all my experience I had never known such a thing to happen.

We see through our glass darkly when we look toward the future, but if we face about and look toward the past, it is awful how clearly we can see. It seemed to me on this Sunday morning that I was looking through thirty years at Peter's congregation, and I saw a number of persons there who would have been only shadows upon my glass when I was young.

A tall man attracted my attention. He was seated on the front bench, holding his head so high that his brown curly beard stuck straight out in front of him. His hair lay back from his lofty brow as if some wind from heaven had blown it. His fine dark eyes were lifted in a sort of penitential gaze at nothing in particular. I had my suspicions the moment my eyes rested on him. Your true saint never looks much like one. If you are experienced in estimating moral and spiritual values in a congregation you discovered long ago that the publican and pharisee sinner never stays put in the back of the church where he belongs and where the Scriptures covering his case so plainly locate him. He is always to be found in the foreground of the sanctuary with nothing but the altar rail between him and the new preacher, waiting to be called on to lead in prayer, which he can do with more humility and anguished eloquence than a plain

good man ever commands. But if he leads the prayer the congregation will not follow. It plants its forelegs and waits for the pastor to discover his mistake, because it usually turns out that he is a professional bankrupt in business, or that he shaves the notes of sinners, or that he has done something to the widows and orphans.

I hoped Peter would not call on this man, who looked so much like a handsome prayer, to lead in prayer until he knew more about his secular reputation.

No one, I suppose, knows what the unpardonable sin is. I have sometimes thought every man chooses his own unpardonable sin, a particular temptation that raises the spiritual hair on the spine of his soul in horror at the very thought of it. For I remember how many different kinds of unpardonable sins William used to be called upon to pass on. But there is no variation at all in what a Christian community regards as unpardonable transgressions. There are two: If a man is dishonest, however successfully; if he is immoral, however delicately and discreetly, they will have none of him in the sanctuary. His prominence there is an offense. They will listen with sympathy to the drunkard's or the fighting man's confessions, they will back him up to the very throne of grace if he leads the prayer; but if you want to quench the Spirit in your church call on a note shaver or Lothario to pray. They will endure him

in the choir, but they will not accept him on his knees.

There is another equally dangerous person in every church, who never sits in the amen corner, nor conspicuously near the front, but somewhere in the body of the congregation, like a concealed weapon. It is impossible to locate him until the dust that has been kicked up over the new pastor is settled and we are all off for the kingdom of heaven together. Then he comes quietly to the preacher and puts him wise to everybody in the church. I have known more than one church to die spiritually from the bite of this serpent in its bosom without ever suspecting him. He used to take the spiritual spunk out of William as no other emanation of Satan ever did, because he invariably left him bereft of comfortable voluntary faith in so many members of his congregation.

I may have been surreptitiously scouting behind my glasses for this person when Peter stood up and gave out the first hymn. For a moment my vision was blurred by the tears in my eyes, by the prayer in my heart. Then I saw Peter clearly, not pale with the sense of his office, a tall slender young man, dark and richly colored, very handsome and perfectly at his ease.

It is now a long time ago, and I do not remember his text. He took it much as he would have taken off his hat upon entering the house, because this is

the custom, and because he would not need it in there. Certainly he did not refer to this text again. And you would not have been able to prove that he had one by the discourse that followed. It fitted the minds of his congregation like a good working shirt. He mentioned the Lord by name several times, but the gist of what he said meant that during this year we should all get together, practice sanity, health, decency and honor and enjoy our virtues.

The people were pleased. They looked refreshed, a little gay, as if they had tasted a new and lively beverage and found it stimulating. They crowded round Peter to shake hands after the service was over. Brother Stone slapped him on the back. They all were animated, and wanted him to know how much they had enjoyed his sermon. But I missed the woman who used so often to come up timidly with tears in her eyes to tell William that she had been strengthened in her faith; I did not see the silent man who had been so moved that he merely wrung William's hand and passed on.

I stood aside and watched my son. I saw him radiating himself among these people, nothing of the priest in his manner. He shook hands so many times and so violently that his forelock fell down on his forehead, making him handsomer than ever. He was flushed with this exchange of happiness. There was nothing wrong in any of it, but there was something, not present—something very old and patient,

that never changes. I hate to say it, but I had the feeling that my son had absolved these people from both their sins and the Holy Spirit. They were considerably lightened of burdens, this was apparent, such was the effect of his sermon, during which he had not referred to sin or to faith or to any of the ancient stepping stones of peace with God.

I heard someone say as we came out that they had got a live wire at last, and now that this church would do something.

This prophecy was fulfilled. That church certainly did do something. It doubled the size of its congregations in three months, and nearly doubled the assessments under Peter's ministry, which was a light and easy ministry. In vain did Brother Stone watch and wait for him to slip up on a doctrine, show the horns and forked tail of a heresy. Peter was too far removed from the very ground where doctrines and heresies are to be found. His sermons had one purpose so far as I could see—to cheer you up, make you forget issues that might confuse your conscience, and to build up the church. His Sabbath sermon was sufficiently secular to fit your weekdays. They were lectures on how to live and prosper Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and so on.

His pastoral visiting was like that of a candidate seeking election. He was full of good will, good works and a sort of incorrigible energy. If you bit

him with one of your meanest, most narrow-minded convictions, he would not assault you with the Scriptures for doing it. He allowed you to keep this conviction as if it was your own property and sacred to you. He almost cured Stone of religious rabies in this way.

The man I had noticed on the front seat that first Sunday was named Belote. He was the leading merchant in Brasstown and had a reputation for doubtful dealing. Peter never reproved him for these transgressions, neither would he permit him to figure prominently in any church enterprise; but he constantly mulched Belote for food to feed the poor, and clothes wherewith to clothe them. No other member contributed so much to charity.

"It is all I can ask Belote to do with propriety," he told me.

He was shockingly intimate with this man.

"Peter," I said to him one day, "do you think you should spend so much time in Belote's store?"

"I must," he answered. "Belote thinks of something wrong to do every day. I go by there to tell him not to do it."

"And does he heed your advice?"

"Oh, yes; but the trouble is he has thought of something else by the time I come next time," he laughed.

"He is a sinner, nothing else," I said sharply.

"Comes from living constantly in the same room with his emotions," said Peter.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, in the old days Belote could—no doubt, would—have qualified as an ascetic desert monk, something of that sort. But it isn't done now, and there is not sufficient opportunity for the exercise of his emotional temperament in the common lot along with the rest of us, so he takes a header now and then," he laughed.

"Soon after we came here Belote told me he was thinking of killing Tracy," Peter went on, smiling.

"Tracy! What could he have against Brother Tracy?" I exclaimed.

"Said Tracy had talked about him."

"He probably deserved censure," I answered.

"Yes; he admitted that. I persuaded him not to kill Tracy."

"Peter, this sounds very cold-blooded."

"No; hot-blooded," he returned. "Then he advised with me about making over all his property to his wife because his creditors were pressing him. I persuaded him not to do that. This morning I was passing his store in a great hurry going to a committee meeting in Stone's office, when Belote rushed out, pale with excitement, caught hold of me like a drowning man and led me back to his desk. He was in deep trouble."

"What was it?"

"He said he was thinking of geeting a divorce from his wife and what did I think of it?"

"The wretch!" I exclaimed, recalling poor little Mrs. Belote, who was the mother of five children.

"He said he could not endure his wife any longer. She ragged him. He had no peace. I advised him not to sue for the divorce."

"He could not get it!"

"So I told him. And I left him submissive to his marriage vows. But next week it will be something else. So you see how it is," Peter concluded, looking across at me, smiling. "I must visit Belote and look after him as a physician attends an incurable patient. He will never be a well man morally, but I can prolong his usefulness by looking after him. He has just contributed enough canned goods for the Boy Scout camp."

I had not served as an understudy to a circuit rider for thirty years without gaining considerable knowledge about sinners of Belote's type. William never compromised the gospel in their favor. He held them up in secret and exhorted them; he called on them nearly by name in public to repent. And I have seen such men soundly converted who lived godly lives afterward. But if they did not repent and believe he turned them out of the church, even if they were prominent members who paid liberally to the support of the ministry. He said it was as immoral to allow them to purchase respectability

when they were not respectable with contributions to the church, as it was to take any other kind of bribe. But if after they had been so disciplined they made their offering in meekness, it was no offense to take it. I thought he was hard on these backsliders. I used to insist that the church should be a sort of hospital where the spiritually halt, lame and blind ought to be received and nursed back to salvation.

"Let them take the treatment and obey the rules of it, then," he would answer, unmoved.

Now as I listened to Peter's account of his pastoral ministrations to Belote I found myself agreeing with William's sterner view. Peter was making a scientific application of the gospel to his case, permitting him to bend the Scriptures to fit his carnal nature. He accepted it as a fact that Belote could not live up to the Christian standard, and made what use he could of him in this condition to further his own pastoral plans. He was honest in this point of view. But there was nothing in Peter that inspired him to stand up, pale to the lips, with the sweat of anguish on his brow and call out to his people, "Repent! Repent! The kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

He wore a sack coat, he had a good color, and his preaching consisted in encouraging everybody to go ahead and do the best he could under the circumstances, which, if you notice, are always furnished by the world, the flesh and the devil.

I should have been proud of him and satisfied, since for so many years I had craved a little easement from the sterner doctrines of salvation. But I was not proud of him. I was terribly uneasy about him and his water-and-sand gospel. You may not be able to live up to them, but your standards of righteousness ought not to vary or be diminished.

I continued to sit prominently near the front in the church at Brasstown, but in my heart I felt far to the rearward. Sometimes when Peter was preaching one of his cheerful prancing sermons I used to wonder what would happen if suddenly I stood up, waved him down and called out: "Tell them, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God . . . and all these things shall be added unto you!' Things, Peter! Teach them the difference between mere things and the kingdom of heaven!"

I reckon he would have sent for the doctor. He did stop in the midst of his sermon when Mrs. Buxton shouted. She was a simple old woman who had acquired the habit of shouting in her younger days, when this was not regarded as a breach of good manners before the Lord. And she would do it upon the slightest rise in spiritual temperature during a service. On this Sabbath evening she was sitting as usual near the altar, her little old gray head and withered face lifted like a candle against the wall. And she was listening no doubt a trifle dizzily to what Peter was saying about the Golden Rule of

God toward man, when she caught sight of the smiling faces of the congregation. She looked round, startled, much as you do when you have missed the point, saw this glow of appreciation all about her and mistook it for spiritual animation. Instantly she bobbed up and out into the aisle with a sort of cataleptic spring, threw her hands over her head and shouted in a high treble voice "G-l-o-r-y!"

She sailed down one aisle and up the other, clapping her hands and letting out one of these little cambric-needle shrieks at rhythmic intervals.

When someone began to shout in the old days the preacher was supposed himself to be too much in the spirit to stop preaching. Rather, he instinctively preached louder, a circumstance which invariably increased the emotional energy of the person shouting. It was not until Mrs. Buxton arrived in front of the pulpit that she realized her pastor had deserted her. Peter was standing like an incensed statue with his eyes damningly fixed upon the clock on the opposite wall. She paused, stared at him like a little old bird whose feathers have fallen, whose wings drag in the dust. Then she drifted backward into the nearest seat, mortally wounded in her spiritual pride.

This was another feather in Peter's cap; everything was, though I doubt if it was to be a jewel in his crown, quenching a good old woman whose ladder to God was her own emotions. But we

heard that she frequently disturbed revival services and that everybody was glad to have her quelled and permanently seated before the revival season began.

Peter had his Brasstown congregation by the hair of the head; that is to say, he reorganized every department of the church along modern lines. He worked under cover through Sister Stone to expand the Women's Missionary Society. He whipped all the men into a laymen's movement, which was to do everything, from keeping the town clean and electing the next mayor to providing extra funds for the personal needs of the church, including lectures and social receptions. He established a credit-and-reward system in the Sunday school which doubled the attendance and excited competition and cupidity in the minds of the young to such an extent that the standards of Biblical scholarship were greatly advanced. Under his leadership the Methodist church became at once the most progressive enterprise in the town. It rocked as if a boom had struck it. But this was not a spiritual boom, there was no hallelujah note in the fuss it made.

I tried not to be critical of Peter, but it seemed to me he was substituting secular methods for the work of the Holy Spirit. I have always resented the old horned stewards in Methodist churches, who made it their Christian duty to nag and obstruct the pastor; but if I had been such a one in this church

at Brasstown I should have laid a restraining hand on Peter. On the contrary, his stewards were secretly boastful about the way he emptied the other churches in town when he preached. And it was a bit stirring to see half of the congregation get up and walk out on Communion Sunday, because they were Baptists and must avoid the embarrassment of having the sacrament offered them.

We had been on this work nearly two months before Job's messengers began to arrive. I have always thought these servants, who brought Job bad news, were the most typical-of-man features of that story. Certainly I never knew a preacher who was not afflicted by them.

One very cold day in December I was sitting in the corner beside the fire in the parlor knitting a muffler. I was trying to finish it for Peter before the following Saturday, when he was to go to his first appointment at Suetally. He was seated reared back very comfortably in the parsonage morris chair, directly in front of the fire. And he was reading Renan's Life of Jesus. I felt the same sense of disapproval that I used to have when I caught him when he was a boy reading doubtful fiction. I knew nothing of this man, Renan, except that he was a Frenchman. I admire the French people. I believe that they are thrifty, brilliant and exceedingly brave, but I have never been able to pin my faith to their godliness. The things I have heard about them are

very fine, but not pious, and frequently not moral. I could not help thinking that what Matthew or Mark or one of the other apostles had to tell of the life of Christ would be more serviceable to Peter as a preacher. I was trying to decide how to broach the subject to him when I heard a sort of muttered disturbance in front of the house. I glanced through the window and saw an enormous old man taking himself carefully out of the buggy and at the same time exhorting the skittish-eared mule which was hitched to it, to "Whoa!"

He was about six feet in height, most of this being in the length of his legs, which were astonishingly thin considering the bulk of his body. He wore a black slouch hat, and gray clothes; his coat had short frock tails which stood out from him as if they did not like him, though they had been associated with him for a long time. He was clean shaven, and his chin stuck out ominously.

I had never seen him before, but I recognized him instantly. He looked and walked like a man empowered by divine Providence with all the authority of misfortune.

Peter, who had also seen him by this time, laid aside his book and went to receive him at the front door.

I snatched up Renan's Life of Jesus and hid it in my work basket. You cannot be too particular about things like that.

I heard Peter admit that he was the new preacher, and the thunderous voice of our visitor announce that he was Altimus Sparks.

"I reckon you have heard of me," he added in the retching tones of a man who is taking off his overcoat and wheezing from the exertion.

We had heard of him! Every man has his voluntary biographers, who publish the record of his deeds. We knew that Brother Sparks was chairman of the board of stewards in the church at Suetally. We had heard that he was as innocent of salvation as a heathen, but he was the heavyweight champion of the Methodist doctrines in that community. He had never been defeated in an argument, and he held the belt, especially on infant baptism.

Peter, who is a tall, well-set-up man, looked small and insignificant beside him when they came in together. I told Brother Sparks how glad I was to meet him at last, which is always a safe prevarication, even morally, because you do it in charity that you may not wound the sensibilities of the person whom you are not glad to see.

He said the usual things in reply, and hoped I was "well, ma'am." Then he sat down in the morris chair, which groaned dangerously. Suddenly the whole room seemed crowded. Peter had to edge his way round to a small chair in the opposite corner.

Sparks was a fat man, whose countenance was not

confined to his mere face. He seemed to look at you from the whole expanse of his broad shirt front. His coat lay back from it like the lips of an enormous grin at your expense.

He wagged us a measuring glance ornamented with an intimate grin. Then he told me he hoped I would pick out a wife for Peter as soon as possible. "Unmarried preacher is as dangerous as a torpedo in a church," he haw-hawed. And having discharged this blunderbuss he informed Peter that he had come to see him about the church at Suetally.

He said this church was on its last legs. It was located in a valley between two mountains and the high waters during the winter and spring rendered it inaccessible. But this was not the worst. It was in a community of Hard-shell Baptists!

I have noticed this, that in mountainous regions where there is a great deal of superfluous water Primitive Baptists always predominate. The nature of the country, the torrential rains, seem to produce them as it does certain plants and water fowls. There is a sort of laurel wreath of them which extends in this section from the high crests of Kentucky through the Cumberland Mountains of Tenessee, and all over the foothills of the Blue Ridge in Georgia and Northern Alabama. Neither Methodist churches nor Presbyterians flourish in these places, and there is practically no such thing as an Episcopalian. I have often wondered whether the weather

and the topography of the country had anything to do with the creed we choose. It is a fearsome thought.

Brother Sparks went on telling Peter about the Primitive Baptists, who were so many thorns in the side of the church at Suetally; how they would not permit their children to attend Sabbath school; how, when the Methodists had a revival and stirred things up and got an altar full of penitents converted, these people invariably started a protracted meeting preaching their doctrines, and the upshot was that they herded these new-born souls through the baptismal waters of the nearest stream into their own church!

I hoped Peter would show some of the natural instincts of a Methodist shepherd over this account of the marauding Baptists at Suetally. But he did not, which troubled me. You cannot be too tolerant and be anything else very definite. The meekest Methodist preacher I have ever known would show fight when provoked by a Baptist. He will lie down, like the lion and the lamb together, with a Presbyterian or an Episcopalian, if so be that the latter will keep him such close company, but he will lash out at a Baptist. His Christianity becomes a sort of doctrinal fierceness. One of the strongest sermons I ever heard William preach was on the broad and catholic meaning of the word "baptist." He was equally imbued with power when he preached on

the doctrine of "election." But he would rest peacefully on his strictly evangelical texts in a town full of Presbyterians and never lift his voice against "predestination."

I have sometimes wondered if this antagonism which Methodists feel toward Baptists does not spring from the class distinction which the latter make when they practice close communion. We all do it who can in the world, but this is the only church which does it openly and honestly before the Lord. I reckon many a Baptist has suffered from being obliged for conscience' sake to behave this way.

Personally I never could see any great difference between the pivotal doctrines of damnation in any of the churches. It comes to the same thing, whether you are not elected to eternal life or are predestined to damnation, or become, as the Methodists believe, an apostate.

What worried me was that Peter never seemed to clinch down and hold views that sternly divided him from the world. He did make a raid during this year on the Baptists at Suetally. He took fifty of the younger ones into his church, but it was on easy terms, and due to his personal popularity rather than to any deep work of grace in them. Brother Sparks was gratified, but he was not satisfied. He was himself a Hard-shell Methodist, and he missed the bones of our doctrines in Peter's sermons. He

used to appear at regular intervals at the parsonage enormous and saturnine, to discuss emersion, free will, and other issues of contention between him and the Suetally Baptists. He was a hungry man. And Peter nourished him in tolerance, which was like offering Sparks a stone when he asked for the blood of his enemies.

"The question is not whether you are baptized one way or the other," he told Sparks one day, "and it is not whether you have an emotional experience or not. Emotions are the mere flowers of the animal temperament"—he used the word animal!—"which bloom quickly and die quickly. It is unnatural and not safe to live according to your transient hallelujahs, because you cannot, and the effort to do so leads to hypocrisy and self-deceit."

When you are not very good yourself, being called to the secular life from birth, you do want your pastor to be a holy man. He represents your vicarious holdings in salvation. Sparks, who was sitting with Peter on the front porch with his legs elevated and his feet resting on the balusters, brought them to the floor with a thump. He leaned forward in his chair and stared at Peter as if he had suddenly discovered that there was no great difference nor distance between him and this man, spiritually speaking. And he was disappointed.

"The important thing in your religious life," Peter

went on, unconscious of this diminishing gaze, "is to shed the sins you inevitably accumulate in the business of living, endeavor to harm no man, do your duty as it really is, not as you wish to see it, render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and keep at it!"

This old ruffian Methodist never came again to commune with his pastor. It was significant. He had been seeking the heights in his perverted way, and he had found Peter on the level.

Sometimes I honored my son for his invincible honesty, for the cool clarity of his mind, the simplicity with which he performed every good office of his calling, as if this was a matter of business. His temper was always serene. He never suffered from moods of spiritual depression. He prepared his sermons carefully, much as teachers prepare lectures. And I discovered that he also prepared the prayers he prayed for his people in church on Sunday. These were very conservative petitions. It seemed that he did not want to inconvenience the Lord to change his plans by granting anything unusual or out of the fixed order of things. I missed that childish and beautiful valor of faith which inspires men to ask the humanly impossible of their Heavenly Father—and get it. This is my point. They do get it! I could not imagine Peter taking his umbrella to church during a drought and praying for rain. It seemed to

me that he never asked for anything which the Lord had not granted or arranged for from the beginning when he created the heavens and the earth, marked off the zones and seasons and established order in everything except the heart of man, which is the one place where creation is still going on.

The brethren in the church at Brasstown furnished a curious commentary on the quality of Peter's prayers. When he began to preach there they shouted their amens as usual, but they gradually ceased to do this. It is only when you have the faith and courage to pray for that which is beyond the bounds of human reason that the brethren hunch the Lord with groans and amens. The reasonableness of Peter on his knees compelled me to fear that he did not really believe in the power of prayer. If we are entirely reasonable we must live like brutes, whose instincts are the result of experience well reasoned out. But if we are at all spiritual-minded we must take the sublime risks of surviving somewhere above the plane of rationalism.

I was the more concerned for Peter because of his sincerity. He was an honest man, but no priest. He had not received his sight, but he walked without fear in places where saints fear to tread. I prayed that the Lord would forgive his presumption. And I was in earnest about it. A mother kneeling before the throne of grace is no puling saint, if she is a saint at all. I was willing that Peter should be tried,

humbled and chastened in his spirit, but I reckon every prayer-bearing angel in heaven knew my position on this matter, and that I would never stand meekly by and see my son destroyed because the mind and learning of these times had enveloped him and obscured his vision of the way, the truth and the life. Peter had some vague sense of my concern for him, but he atrtibuted it to my old-fashioned notions, and got on very well with me by evading issues.

We are queer creatures. One of the conditions of life in this world, I believe, is that we cannot be satisfied. I used to wish for a little carnal rest, not the kind you have when for a moment you "sit and sing your soul away to everlasting bliss," which was always too high an experience to be comfortable; but I longed for human repose in the things that are here and now. I might be attending to the plain duties involved in securing this repose, like putting my house in order or darning our Sabbath clothes, but I never could be quite at peace knowing that William was in the study across the hall or pacing up and down behind the house wrestling in prayer for the "witness of the Spirit," because I never did know whether he would get it or not, and that kept my heart aching and anxious for him. Now I found myself worrying because Peter did not seem to feel the "burden of souls." I was homesick for the past.

I longed for one of those old-fashioned revivals where the congregation dwells in a sort of penitential anguish on this chorus of the opening hymn:

Lord, revive us, Lord revive us!
All our strength must come from Thee.
Lord, revive us! Lord re-vi-ve us a-gain!

I used to get tearful sometimes when I thought of those scenes back there in the old candlelit churches. Then I'd go out in the yard and look up and down that street in Brasstown and wonder if I ought not to go and see somebody in affliction, or who was sick; but there was a committee for doing every single Christian thing in Peter's church, and I was not on the one that dealt with the sick and afflicted. Then maybe Sister Stone, who lived next door, would come out on her porch and hail me and want to know if I was well to-day.

I have noticed this, that nobody ever asks a man if he is well; but one woman invariably asks another woman if she is. My health was always good, but I did not feel well. My immortal spirit seemed to be run down, and I had to resist the temptation to tell Sister Stone that I was not very well, but just able to be up and about. Then she would ask me to come over and have some ice cream if it was a hot afternoon. Or, if it was in the morning she would fly back in the house and reappear with some toma-

toes, which she insisted upon my taking because my plants had not done well and she had discovered that Peter liked tomatoes. They were all kind and thoughtful. But it seemed to me I had few opportunities to practice my own kinder virtues.

I remember a rosebush in the back yard of this parsonage at Brasstown. It must have been about my age, as the life of a rose is reckoned, elderly, and somewhat amorphous as to shape, with its branches sprawling like a wide skirt on the ground. I became attached to this old bush. I had come in the winter season and could not tell what kind of rose it was, as you do not know this woman or that one until you see her doing her daily, not her Sunday deeds. In February I cut away the dead branches and tied the others up, dug round the roots and fixed it up according to the directions in the Scripture for the barren fig tree. I used to slip out there every day and pick the bugs off and watch the buds swell. Then suddenly one morning late in May after a warm rain the night before, I found it covered with a rich dark red mass of old-fashioned velvet roses. I had not seen one for years. The variety is practically extinct, like certain kinds of people.

I was reduced to that, you understand, feeling kin to an old bush in the back yard which must have been planted there about the time I started out as a Methodist itinerant's wife.

As the year drew to a close at Brasstown I thought

I felt a reaction in the church toward Peter. Some of the older members grew strangely quiet. Now and then one of them looked at him queerly as you do at a genial and successful promoter who has done much for your town but who is about to pass on to other fields leaving you to handle the best way you can the big business he has started, which has been a very expensive business, and you knew very well that he made you hit a pace that you cannot keep up, not if you were redeemed and baptized every six months.

In short, I think they began to realize with dolorous misgivings that the showing Peter would make at Conference might have the effect of increasing their assessments next year, besides giving them a reputation for being progressive, which they doubted if they could keep up even under his leadership. I thought they were singularly resigned, however, to the notion that he would not be back, but would undoubtedly receive a much better appointment. Everybody liked him, but the old financial heads wagged when they computed what it had cost them to keep him. They figured shrewdly that they could do very well spiritually with a less expensive preacher. I thought myself that this church would be years recovering from Peter's executive ability, and that if he should be sent back he would find a much more difficult proposition on his hands.

Fortunately he was moved and given a much better appointment. But I have written at length on his first year in the itinerancy, because of what happened afterward.

CHAPTER III

I NEED not have been so concerned about facing the old-fashioned saints on the backwoods circuits with Peter and his newfangled ministry. You cannot keep an up-to-date preacher on a circuit far out in the hills where Providence measures the rain and the seasons according to his wisdom, not according to your particular needs, and where the people walk with a stoop as if they said with their very backs, "Thy will be done!" Their circuit rider must be a little run down intellectually from not being able to afford the latest books by the highest critics on the Scriptures. He must be sufficiently weather-beaten spiritually to prove how close kin he is to eternal things and just the word.

Peter was no such preacher. I do not say that the training he had fitted him for a closer walk with God, but it certainly did fit him for serving a different class of people altogether. It seemed that the Conference thought so, for he was sent to an up-and-doing church in an up-and-doing town the next year. Brasstown was the last glimpse we had of the backwoods gospel area in the Methodist itinerancy. And Suetally Chapel was the only out-and-out country church he ever served.

We heard sad news from this church the following summer. The last of the fifty converts Peter had filched from the Hard-shell Baptists had got themselves properly immersed and gone back into the church of their fathers and of the streams and hills of that section! There are certain Scriptures, I have often thought, which should not be used except in extreme cases, as you resort to a dangerous and desperate remedy for a patient who is about to die, anyhow. Even then they ought not to be spoken at people from the pulpit, and you would be barely justified in recalling them secretly and sadly in your heart, that you may work the harder and pray the more earnestly that they do not apply in the case of this man or that woman whose spiritual condition is very bad. The twenty-second verse of the second chapter of Second Peter always seemed to me most awful and the least quotable. I doubt if anybody but an old fisherman disciple who had been accustomed all his life to ugly sights and disagreeable smells would have used such a figure of speech to convey a disastrous truth. But I have observed this —not to paraphrase what Saint Peter said at all— that a man with a Baptist-made mind will return to his doctrine every time. He will do it in his secret heart, even if you are able to keep his name on the roll of your Methodist church. You may wrestle in prayer for his immortal soul at your altar, and you may have the joy of seeing him converted

there; but when it comes to signing up his membership contract to live and die in grace, our vows do not fit the awful strictness of his mind; the little water we pour on his head is not enough to satisfy the cleansing symbolism of a complete baptism. He wants to be dipped. This is not foolishness. Nothing is foolish which satisfies a man's conscience about assuming so great an obligation.

I warned Peter that there would be some backfiring in this church at Suetally when these recently redeemed Baptists whom he had taken into it realized how lightly and insufficiently they had been merely sprinkled in the name of the Lord. But he always left the dead to bury their dead on the work from which he had passed. His whole mind and attention was fixed on the church where he was the present pastor in charge. His only comment upon the disaster at Suetally was that probably the preacher who followed him had fallen under the influence of Brother Sparks and had stirred up the animus of the community by preaching doctrinal sermons.

His advancement in the Conference was remarkable when you consider the military system under which our church is governed, a system complicated with paternalism in a very literal sense. Thus a preacher may be sent to a certain church when he is not qualified to fill it, because he has a large family and must have an appointment that will support him. Peter was not married. I was the only family he

had, and I was merely the relict of a former family, but he was given appointments that might easily have supported a preacher with a wife and five children.

The bishop of a Methodist Conference has a cabinet. The members of it are all "secretaries of interior," but they are called presiding elders. And like Higher Adams, they have dominion over three or four hundred preachers in this Conference. Some of them are holy men, some are not so holy but have great executive ability. Others, with no particular renown for either piety or ability, have that queer thing common to many men who never succeed at anything but politics. They wear velvet gloves on their spiritual fingers and have astounding influence in managing the affairs of our church. But nearly all of them have the horse-trading instinct. The difference is that they trade preachers with one another. And it is natural for a presiding elder to strive to get the best preachers in his district. I do not know that there is anything wrong in the practice, but it is sometimes hard on an old itinerant warhorse, who has seen his best day and has grown stiff in his legs from so many years of hard service. His presiding elder swaps him off for anything he can get, maybe a youngster just entering ministry—a risk, but a better one than an old man who had failed in everything but his Psalms and prayers.

My belief is that Peter owed his rapid promotion to his reputation in the bishop's cabinet for building up every church he served. His reports at the Annual Conference always flattered him. He was like oil on troubled waters in a church row. He even managed to get his board of stewards to live in love and charity with him, though I still maintain that he could not have done it two years in succession in the same church, because by the end of the first year he had invariablly driven them so hard that if he had been returned they would have shown him their heels, if I know Methodist stewards as well as I think I do. Anyhow, Peter was in demand with the presiding elders. He was the shooting star of his Conference. And he always landed with his light shining as pastor in one of the larger churches. This was bad for him, I thought. A preacher may think he has surrendered all for the sake of his Lord's service, but he never can be sure until he gets a poor little runt of a circuit somewhere when he was expecting a good appointment. Then if he can keep his heart from burning about the juggling and swapping among the elders that resulted in his getting this backset in the ministry, and if he "takes this work as from the Lord," in spite of what he knows went on in the cabinet, he is really qualified in grace and humility for a better place in the next world at least.

Peter was sent to big country towns for two or three years. I went along, with William's old box

of sermons and Kitto's Commentaries, you may say as a sort of maternal epilogue to my son. I did not have any active part in his work. I was merely present, not voting. It is my belief that I knew as much about the future as Peter and his dizzy congregations did; but I felt like an old gray-headed "Nay, Nay" whose face had been turned forcibly toward the past and made to sit that way while my son led his flocks joyfully through the pleasanter, greener pastures of the right-now period.

I have been tempted to write a book of meditations for elderly people's indignant comfort and gratification about the way we are removed from the order of things just when we know more than anybody else does about life, and have developed the instinct to teach and manage the world according to experience, not experiments.

I could say a few things that would knock the socks off of pretentious youth. If we in our years made the mistakes, did the foolhardy things and risked without testing the theories they try out, frequently at the whole world's expense, the last one of us would be put in the mad house. Very few of us die of our years. We are dead while yet we live because they counsel us with the tenderest kindness. Peter had that way with me: "You are growing old, mother. You must not exert yourself too much. Don't worry. Just run round and visit and enjoy yourself. You have had a hard life. Now take

things easy. I am getting on with my work. The people like my preaching. I have the largest congregations they ever had in this church, so they tell me."

He would say something like that.

And I would answer something like this: "But, Peter, you do not search the hearts of your people. You never mention their sins. Sin is a word you do not use. You do not exhort them to repent and believe. You do not seem to realize, my son, that the world has lost its faith. You preach salvation by prosperity."

Then I would tell him the things his prominent members were doing, things forbidden in the Christian life as well as in the discipline of our church. And he would retort by reminding me of the good they were also accomplishing—so much for charity, so much for mission, so much for general collections. He was an optimist, but not spiritual.

Then I'd get up and go into another room, sit down, fold my hands and think how queer it was to be like this. I recalled so many years when I was an up-and-doing woman in the church whose opinion was regarded. I remembered how I used to tell Peter to go and say his prayers, and he went and said them. How I taught him what was right and what was wrong, and he believed me. Now this church might as well be some kind of economic institution of learning in which I felt like an old dunce. And now I

had lost my grip on Peter as if he were a wayward son.

It all comes to this—you must be meek at last. This is the fate of every man and of every woman when the years stretch farther and farther behind you, and you feel the cold east wind of another country blowing in your face. You may bluster about it, deny your age, vow that you feel as young as you ever did, keep your place in the world or the church and even in the conversation, but your bones tell no lies. They ache at night as if your flesh was a frost on them. And sometimes even in company you must reach down slyly to loosen a shoe string because your feet are tired and swollen from the long, long journey you have come, though you do not walk much now. If you keep your place in the world it is only through courtesy or through the prestige you acquired before you became what you are now. If no one interrupts you when you monopolize the conversation, if they listen respectfully and never contradict you nor oppose your opinions, that is a fatal sign. They do not believe a single thing you say. Your wisdom is like your old coat; it does not fit the arching back of their younger views. They are merely practicing good manners to the aged. They do not really hear what you are saying. They may be even attending your funeral, thinking of you in the terms of your obituary. What a fine woman you used to be in your prime?

I had this experience sometimes when we were asked out to tea. I was so often reminded by contrast of some other supper William and I had in a cabin by candlelight long ago with old Brother Rhuebottom and his wife. Or I would get off on the experiences we had during one of his best revivals, where sinners were converted and saints shouted. Then suddenly I would realize that everybody was being politely silent but not really listening. And probably my hostess would be regarding me with lifted brows and a small, thin smile, and I understood by the enticing way she said, "Yes," and "Weren't those grand old days?"—as if these days were now finely polished swords hanging on the wall for keepsakes—that she was sacrificing herself to my garrulity and trying to make herself my only victim so that the other guests might go on talking about what they had been talking about when I started off on this tangent that led backward into the past. I used to feel a little hurt, and withdrew as soon as possible into the proper silence of my years.

It is all very well to be dead to the world, but it is a queer and depressing sensation to discover that the world is dead to you. It is not so easy to take a back seat in your old age when in your prime you were a prominent person, even if you were only distinguished for your meekness and long-suffering. And there are moments to the last when you must

spring to your feet from force of habit, wave your hand and say: "My dear brethren, I rise to a point of personal privilege. Everybody here is wrong but me!"

You may as well sit down and let the wrong go on. The brethren will not recognize you. You are out of order.

I have seen this trembling-kneed tragedy too many times not to recognize the symptoms of it in my own case. So I tried to be patient and wait for what would happen. I wanted to be somewhere round when the mountains fell on Peter. I have never claimed to be a very good woman; but I have noticed this, that there are two things that cannot be changed—the weather and the word. We have changed everything else. We have made the earth over many times on top. We have built cities where rivers ran. We sail a thousand ships where once was dry land. We have cut out the whole geography of the world half a dozen times. We have moved races as if they were baggage. We have produced new nations and new civilizations. Sometimes I have thought in a horrified moment that if God had not made this earth some man would have made it. Give him an anvil and an atom and he can do nearly anything that is a thing. But who by taking thought can change the wind from the east to the west, or cause one drop of rain to fall, or make a season fair when clouds steam up? That breath which the Lord

breathed upon this earth when he said, "Let there be light," so that he could set up a firmament to divide the waters from the waters and establish the dry land, and started the grass to growing with the dew on it, is the same wind that blew up the first cloud from which the rain fell, and it is still blowing where it listeth according to his mind and his seasons. And we cannot do a thing about it except put on more clothes and build a fire; or take off some clothes and not build a fire.

It is the same with the word. We cannot change it. It is the weather of immortality. It is the very breath of God to the soul of man. Nothing we do or think can take its place. The fact remains that the pure in heart do see God, and they do it by faith. They are good by faith, they love and hope by faith, and they are the only peace makers in this world who do make and keep the peace. They are the safe people. The word is their law and their life. They are still the leaven that leaveneth what we call Christian civilization. They are yet the most powerful and most influential people among us without making a fuss about it. They hold things together in spite of wars and politics and the masses and classes who work and work in idleness and bitterness to achieve their greeds and purposes.

What does it matter that the mere form of the Scriptures is blown down the windy ages to us out of songs and myths, as the mere body of a man comes

up from the familiar dust? The truth is in them, as the spirit of Something not dust is in man. This truth cannot be changed without destroying man by the very perversity of man. Look at the witnesses against him. Every other living leopard thing, every flying, crawling, creeping, walking thing is instinctively afraid of him. They know that he is different, something more or worse than a mere animal.

I never had much learning, but I have accumulated considerable wisdom of the kind a wayfaring man, even if he is not very bright, gets, simply by doing the way he ought to do. And I have observed that it does something to a man who substitutes his reason and his convenience for faith in God. Reason belongs to just our dust, and that part of us only belongs to the time of day in which we live. And if we do not believe beyond this dust that merely clothes us and this short day which is only a little spoolful of time, wound out of eternity and cannot be broken but takes us again into it—well, you can look round and see what it does to people. A lot of them are snarled up in just this world's time of day. They are the halt, lame and blind among us, trying to prepare a revolution that will enable them to take what they will not earn, trying to destroy the word which is the only law that cannot be repealed, amended or changed.

It will not happen. That revolution will not come off. It will not, even if it comes, because a revolu-

tion is by nature a mere blast of temper. It cannot go on. And when the dust of it clears and the dead of it are buried, nothing of any real importance will be changed. Everything will be ready, as it was in the beginning—the same weather, the same inviolate word for those who shall have learned that the "perfect law of liberty" is work and obedience.

During these earlier years of Peter's ministry I was at a loss to discover the name of the thing he had so innocently and honestly substituted for the religion of his fathers. Finally I discovered that it was not God at all, merely the science of human duty. Every preacher has his favorite bywords of the gospel. William's were: "Ye must be born again," "Believe in me and ye shall have eternal life," "Keep the faith," and a hundred similar phrases. But Peter was always quoting from some Ph.D. So-and-So, who was a scholar but not an apostle.

One must not object to these books as literature, and no doubt they are useful to people who desire to cultivate a sober dullness of mind and character. But for the priests of God there are the teachings of Jesus, the first and second Epistles of the Apostles, the Acts to guide him in practical service. And if he ought to touch up his congregation with a little harshness, he can always find it in the Old Testament. I never thought much of Solomon as a Christian man, but he had a dolorous wisdom of life that suits the taste of the bitterer saints. And if there

is some transgressor in his congregation who he knows ought to be searched out and attended to, it is not necessary to call him by name and hurt his feelings. The preacher has only to take his text from the right Psalm, because David has prepared all the rituals of penitence any kind of sinner needs. If he wants eloquence to inspire him there is Isaiah, the most nobly eloquent man, living or dead, without one strain of Promethean impotence in the torrential splendors of his great spirit.

One Sunday Peter read the Ten Commandments, and then preached, you may say, at random on the moral law. He did not take these commandments one by one and test his people with them. He did not quote from Moses or any other Scripture. But he said a good deal in this sermon, which I believe was quoted, more than you could prove, because you could not tell exactly when he passed from Hegel to Hobbes, except that now and then he seemed to strike a sort of intellectual air pocket when he dropped in plain view of the humbler intelligences in his congregation. I watched him, and I was bound to conclude that these descents were the only parts of that discourse which he had got from his own thinking, and all of it was seventh cousin removed from the Scriptures, which are always addressed personally to "you" and may always be recognized by that.

Finally he passed entirely out of sight in a sort of passive verb obscurity though he was mounted on what he called Kant's "categorical imperative."

I remember an old man named Glass who lived years ago in one of our college towns. He was distinguished for his simplicity and for the fact that he was almost stone deaf. He had not attended religious services for thirty years on this account. But having learned that a celebrated doctor of divinity would preach on the psychology of Saint Paul he dusted his coat, combed his long white beard and went to church that day. He sat on the front bench, leaning far forward, his doddering old head cocked to one side, his hand cupped back of his best ear, and his eyes fixed in a sort of rheumy astonishment on the great man, who read what he had to say about the vertebra of Saint Paul's spiritual nature in a moderate speaking voice, no animation, no gestures to nearten up this wasteful use of good English, dully assembled.

Peter's congregation regarded him much in the same manner on this occasion. They were plain people out of an enterprising country town, well dressed, comfortable, but not furbished up mentally, accustomed all their church lives to doctrines and amens and evangelistic preaching. They backslid right there. I saw them do it. They listened with a concentrated attention which they would never have given to a plain gospel sermon. Peter had them on

their mettle. They were determined to understand him if it were humanly possible. This was the height of their ambition, to skin the cat intellectually whenever he did.

The modern preachers seem to me to be divided into at least two classes—those who really do preach the gospel, but without any vital faith in its power to move the people, and those who preach just ethics, which is not preaching at all. It is offering a set of fashionable people or unfashionable people who have not been regenerated his own favorite butternut pattern of morals. Maybe he tells them from which firm of writers he gets it, maybe he does not. It comes to the same thing. What he says does not carry with it the power of conviction.

You cannot go on being meek all the time, not even if you are old and everybody has passed you in the dust of the road. There comes a day when you get a vision through a rift in this dust, you see the mountains shaking. You know something is going to happen, and you get up for one brief moment to bar the way and stop this foolishness. You do not succeed. Nobody sees you, but you have the indignant consolation of having had your say.

I waited that day until Peter had taken his Sabbath-afternoon rest, but when he came out in the cool of the evening to sit behind the vines on the porch I was there.

He made some remark about what a pleasant day

this had been, and seeing that he did not refer entirely to the admirable autumn weather, but to some feeling of personal satisfaction he had in it, I replied briefly in the affirmative just wide enough to cover the day. He asked me if I noticed what a large congregation he had at the morning service. I admitted that a great many people were there.

"I never preached to a more attentive audience!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, they listened as if they were deaf," I answered.

He glanced at me inquiringly.

"What was that you quoted, toward the last of your sermon?" I asked.

He was pleased. When you are young and do not know how simple real wisdom is, and have just preached a learned discourse, you do crave the humbler admiration of your fellow men, even if it is only your old gray-haired mother.

"Oh, yes," he answered; "I hope they all got that. It sums up the whole business of living: 'Act only on the maxim which thou canst at the same time will to become the universal law,'" he repeated sonorously.

"Why didn't you quote Matthew, seventh chapter and twelfth verse, then, without calling it somebody's categorical imperative?" I demanded.

He flirted his head round and caught the look I was giving him over the top of my glasses.

It was a plagiarism of the Golden Rule, but I doubt if your congregation recognized it, fussed up in that egotistical thunder of words," I said.

Peter was regarding me as you do a member of your family who shows the impudence of invincible ignorance.

"Mother!" he exclaimed. "You are referring to one of the greatest thinkers of the age."

"And I am reminding you of the greatest Teacher of all ages, who said the same thing so simply that a wayfaring man could understand it and do it without puffing himself up by willing it on the rest of us as universal law. That man didn't think it, Peter; he learned it, and then hid it in philosophical terms, as doctors and lawyers conceal the plain meaning of medicines and laws in Latin words and big phrases," I told him.

He was silent, not from regret but from filial repression. I took the advantage of him that Nature gave me and went on speaking.

"You are whitewashing your people, Peter. You are not teaching them to live by faith and to do the will of God. You are teaching them how to choose a convenient pattern of morals for this present world. You read the Ten Commandments this morning; then you quoted, but you scarcely mentioned Moses, who led an undisciplined people through lands and wildernesses for forty years, not because he taught them that these were the principles of moral law

but because he taught them to believe that they were literally from the Lord Almighty. Could a single man you quoted this morning lead a people by reading them his own essays on morals? They could not. They lack that authority of true prophets—"Thus saith the Lord!"

I got up heavily out of my chair, feeling very much moved because I had not moved Peter. I was about to pass into the house through the door behind him when I had another thought. Sometimes I fear that this will happen to me after my last breath is gone, that I may have a thought without being able to speak it, and that I shall lie uneasily in my very grave with it sticking up out of the dust of my mortal mind like a flame.

"My objection to just ethics, Peter," I said, addressing the back of his head, "is that they have too many parents, both heathen and pagan, and that these parents borrow from each other and taint their systems with this commerce of ideas, and that they are coldly impersonal, and that you cannot tell by the noble language they use whether they are Christians or atheists. Right now there are agitators in this country quoting the same men you quoted this morning, and they are working at the very foundations of our peace and order."

Then I went in, wiped my eyes and said tearfully, "Oh, William, William!" and "Lord be merciful to Peter, a fool, but my son, and an honest man!"

Then I prepared our evening meal, which is a light one on Sunday, and told Peter I was not very well, and would not go to church that night, because I was fearful of what I had done to him, and that I might quench whatever spirit he had to preach with.

In 1917 Peter had his first city church, at Drumhead, which is a fashionable suburb of the capital of this state. It was separated from the city by the country club and golf links. It was a small but very handsome church. The membership was also small but composed entirely of rich and fashionable people. There were no publicans and sinners in this church, and no poor people in Drumhead. If you wanted to do something charitable you must get into your limousine and be driven five miles in the opposite direction to find the perpetually poor. A good deal of this went on in Drumhead.

I have noticed that rich people like to have their good deeds and pay high for them, as they like to have fine rugs on their floors and do not mind the price. I doubt if they enjoy any luxury their wealth affords more than they do this elegant Samaritanism. But sometimes when I saw Mrs. Buckhart go by in her big car on her way to do her alms in the city I used to think of Sister Sally Tears, an old "widow indeed" that William and I knew years ago. She lived in a little house that looked like a gray eyebrow on the side of the mountain. She was herself an object of charity. The county contributed something

to her support, and the church did the rest. Whenever the collection for the poor was taken we always knew we were wasting our nickels and dimes on Sister Sally Tears, because she was disgracefully extravagant with her charities. She was always dividing her measure of meal with somebody, or getting her feet wet and being laid up with rheumatism for us to nurse her, because she had gone off in bad weather to nurse somebody else. Finally she capped the climax by adopting an orphan, and not a serviceable orphan at that, but a crippled boy who was about to be sent to the poorhouse. The only explanation she ever gave was that she was "tired of being a childless widow."

I used to feel sorry for Mrs. Buckhart sometimes. She was very rich, and she was charitable, but she did not know how to administer her funds. She was autocratic. She snatched the poor whom she adopted bodily out of the ways that fitted their minds and spirits. She rebuked them. She wanted to scrub them and make them over in her own image. She would tell them what she thought of them, which was nothing good, then she would come back and tell us what she told them and what she did to them. They took her money, but the poor things did not love her. She was a damnable providence who fed them and reigned over them with a trained nurse and a manual on sanitation.

It is easier to give all your goods to feed the poor,

or not to have any goods—only your virtues, to boast of—than it is to judge the rich with charity. I was probably unjust to Mrs. Buckhart, who could not help being imperative about her good deeds, when I compared her with Sally Tears, who was a perverse old woman never conscious for one moment of her charities. But I thought of her, because she also was an autocrat, like this rich woman. When she took on that orphan she made us support him. She did not beg, she went out and took up a collection of what she needed and would have for that child. She would not keep him clean, but she made the good and bad people of that community contribute funds to get him through school, and the last I heard of him he was a telegraph operator anxious to remove Sally Tears, then a very old woman, from being a charge on the community. He could not do it. She went on mulcting the church and the sinners for funds which she applied according to her notions for the relief of other people. She was the most autocratic philanthropist I ever saw except Mrs. Buckhart. But I always thought she had more genius for this business, because she used the community as her treasury, and Mrs. Buckhart depended upon her own pocket. I do not know how charitable she would have been if she had had no pocket.

There was no amen corner in this church at Drumhead, and this was hard on me, being obliged to sit with my whole back to the congregation, with no

polite way of seeing what was going on behind me. But nothing went on. These people had their pews. They rustled in softly and sat there for an hour on Sunday mornings. It was a sort of elegant acknowledgment of the Lord they made in his absence. The immortal soul was the skeleton in the closet among them. I had not been there a week before I discovered that it was indelicate to mention even my own soul, or to say anything about temptation or holiness. I had to learn not to mention the Lord at tea parties. I reckon there was an element of decency and reverence in this spiritual reserve—if only I could have believed it was spiritual. Maybe it is all in the way you are raised. Now I was never embarrassed by a reference to the will of God anywhere, but never in my life have I mentioned my own legs to a human being. If I had rheumatism and was obliged to tell the doctor where, I mentioned my right limb, which had been long afflicted this way, but even the young girls in this church at Drumhead talked as freely of their legs, and showed them in a way that made me ashamed to go out on the street with Peter. Maybe it is really more modest to be entirely unconscious of your limbs, even if they attract much public attention, and at the same time to be so conscious of the sacredness of your immortal soul that you shrink from any social reference to it. I am saying that it felt queer to me, not judging them at all.

Peter was punctilious about his ritual and the forms of his service. This is gratifying to fashionable people. They are disposed to reduce everything to a mode, and their sensibilities are very delicate. I knew a good preacher once who was not acceptable to a city congregation because he used agricultural illustrations in his sermons, even going so far as to mention by its given name that barnyard product with which land is fertilized. The poor man had preached for twenty years on the country circuits, where the odor of fertilizers pervaded the church itself when farmers came in hurriedly from the fields to attend a quarterly meeting on Saturday. Peter made no such mistake. He was not given to gestures, as you do not cross your legs in company or show much animation if you are extremely well bred. And if he used an illustration he took it from astronomy or the poets or some source implying his recognition of the culture which this congregation exhaled.

I used to sit in this church at Drumhead on Sunday morning and think about those first churches, at Antioch, and Ephesus, and Corinth, and of Timothy, the young pastor whom Paul left in charge. I doubt if they had churches at all. Maybe at first they held services in a back room somewhere or in the home of one of the dutiful widows. They must have had a very real sort of worship. No ritual, no hymns. Maybe they hummed a Psalm or two, and prayed, gathered close together as sheep do in

very bad weather. I could see Timothy, pale and worn with anxiety for their safety and the burden of these souls committed to his care. I reckon it was a great occasion when he had a letter from Paul, a prisoner in Rome. When he drew it forth and showed it to them maybe they clapped their hands for joy to know that Paul was still living and remembering them; and nobody called it "shouting." Shouting in my opinion is a very gross word in this connection, probably used by some person on the back bench who knew nothing of the experience he made it cover. Then I could see the stir among the little company. The "widows indeed" keep their seats a little back in the shadows with their heads properly covered, but the others crowd round Timothy, who is about to read what Paul says; not all of the letter, but extracts from it. They crane their necks and look over one another's shoulders and listen. And the widows begin to weep softly, even if the instructions Timothy got concerning them were a bit harsh. For some reason or another widows were partial to Paul, maybe because he kept them safe and humble before the Lord. And maybe those closer about Timothy had tears in their eyes as he read what Paul said about enduring all things and if we suffer, we shall also reign with him. And how God had not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Then would follow messages to this one and that one who "oft refreshed

me, and was not ashamed of my chain." Also warnings against this man or that one who had not been true to the faith.

I do not question Paul's divine inspiration, but there is no doubt in my mind that he had the overbearing nature and the irascible temper of a great man. But that which has always touched me most was his concern for the people in these little churches. The anguished sweetness of his love for them, his fatherly concern for Timothy, even telling him what to do for his indigestion, and no fear for himself about to be slain. Twelve preachers like this one, my masters, set the world on fire with a new faith. Now half a million of them cannot move this same world trained in the doctrines of the Christian religion. There is just one reason—they do not believe in the gospel they preach. They are beginning to "divide the word of truth." There is only one way to test the Scriptures. That is to believe them.

I used to sit and listen to Peter's sermons and think on the side about these things which were not in his sermons. He was a good preacher in a way. I doubt if the average person in this congregation missed the thing that was lacking in his ministry. As a pastor he ardently believed in his fellow man. This was one of his limitations. It is written in the Scriptures that you shall love your fellow man with all charity and sacrifices, but watch him, keep your eye on him, warn him, rebuke him, be his keeper and his

brother; but it does not say anywhere that you shall be such a fool as to believe in him. It says believe in God and put your whole trust in him and his word if you hope to be justified.

Peter was so popular with the women in this church that they invited him to deliver some lectures before the women's clubs. Now modern women must have lectures, of course, because they must obey somebody, and they no longer keep the domestic laws of obedience and service. I do not reproach them for that, though I have never known one who could justify her escape from these bonds. But it made me nervous when these clubwomen spotted Peter as being easy enough or vague enough to satisfy their cultural cravings. I have never heard of a woman's club inviting a plain old-fashioned circuit rider to address them. They want novelists, dramatists, poets and psychics to teach them. They hate the naked, unvarnished truth as if it were an indecency. They live in their imaginations. You cannot tell now from looking at a woman even in church if she is an honest Christian. She may have taken to just her aura or to free thought. She may be bedridden on a theory of mysticism; or a spiritist holding communications with the dead over an ouija board. Give me a picketing suffragist every time; not that I could bear one, but she may be arrested and removed, but there is no law for disciplining the innocuously cultured woman. Even if she is not a spiritist

she is the medium through which sickly stuff is spread.

By this time Peter's hair was a trifle thin in front. He had a gray lock on each temple, as if the gravity of a thought had touched his youth there. He was a very handsome man. He had escaped the pallor of the ministry, retaining his rich coloring. And he was still unmarried. So far he had escaped romantic complications, either from celibate reserve or shrewdness. I could never be sure. He had no spiritual blind side from which some preachers suffer in their relations to women. It was impossible to slip up on him through the Scriptures. Women were shy of confessing their sins to him, I suppose because he so rarely stirred up the seat of sin in his preaching. My belief is that they all felt the merciless sanity of his relations to them as a pastor, and they fought shy of him. But I could not tell what would happen to Peter now in this houri atmosphere of veiled mysticism which pervaded the Drumhead Women's Club, and I was very uneasy about him. It is bad enough when some prayer-meeting lady saint wants to read Second Samuel with your husband if he is her pastor; but you know what to do with her. It is much worse when a beautiful young woman wishes to consult your son, who is her pastor, on the monism of Parmenides, because if you are a Christian woman you do not know who this Parmenides is, and you do not know what to say to her.

Isobel Sangster was a member of Peter's congregation, though it turned out that she was not a member of any church. She attended services regularly and sat always in the same place, against the wall between the two windows on the right-hand side. She dressed with elegant simplicity, no ornaments of any kind except her brilliant red hair, her brown eyes and her exquisite skin. She always wore the same colors, pale green with the frost of whiteness on it like sage leaves. It was as if she had had a portrait painted of herself and stuck to it. I remember thinking the first time I saw her what a beautiful corpse she would make, she was that pale and still, you understand.

Then I began to notice her a good deal because her eyes clung to Peter when he would be preaching with a sort of hypnotic intensity. I saw that she was not well in her mind. And I did not think she was under conviction for sin, because Peter did not say anything to convict people of their sins. The next thing I observed was that Peter faced oftener toward the right in the pulpit, and devoted most of his ministry to that side of the house. But that girl would get up every time and leave the church without speaking to him and telling him how much she enjoyed the sermon. It is a mystery to me yet how she met him and where, but she did. She was only a stranger in church on Sunday morning. She used to pass the parsonage in her electric and bow to Peter

on the porch. Then she stopped one day and had a long talk with him about this Parmenides.

There was no place for me in this conversation, but I remained present. She gracefully relaxed and talked like a dream. Peter conducted himself like a normal man with a beam in his eye. Apparently nothing she said could convince him that she was not a beautiful woman with brown eyes and red hair. His manner meant that. Otherwise he disregarded her, the point of view she held, as if this was too absurd to consider, and as if her complexion was the main thing that interested him. She could not fail to feel this, but she held her note languidly, like a sad squeak in the dark. I heard her tell Peter as she was leaving that the mystical spirit would never be satisfied, if fully developed and fearless, with anything short of absolute nothing! I heard Peter laugh as you do when a pretty woman flirts with you under cover. He accompanied her to her car, bestowed her in it, and returned, still flushed, smiling and running his fingers through his hair, which is a man's way of kicking his wings when his spirit crows.

After this he saw a good deal of Isobel Sangster, and I think he would have married her if she had been of disposing mind toward him. But Peter was only one of those experiments she made in the mysticism of love along her adventurous way. Looking backward I can see that she was good for him, like having the measles and whooping cough when he was

a little boy, because she was one of those modern women who disease society, and Peter had to deal with them so constantly from this time that it was just as well he had sufficient knowledge of the type to recognize them. But at the time I was very uneasy. I thought he ought to marry, and I frequently told him so; but no mother really wants her son to marry, and I knew it was not in me to bear with such a woman as my son's wife.

This was the situation early in March of 1917. Peter was preaching essays on the gospels and lecturing at the Women's Club and courting Isobel Sangster. I was crimping my front hair, dressing for dinner and keeping a cook for the first time in my life. I felt wickedly prosperous and could not help myself, because Peter instited that we ought to live up to the social standing of the people in his church in order not to embarrass them or seem mean.

Since 1914 the war had been going on in Europe. We discussed this war as neutrals should. Peter prayed for the war-stricken nations every Sunday. And we had bazaars to get funds for them. Charity was no longer religious, it became fashionable. Our bounties fell alike on the just and the unjust in this conflict. We sent hospital supplies, food and funds to all the belligerents. We sent a Christmas ship in 1914 that left units of dolls at Havre, Liverpool and Rotterdam. Even in 1915, we allowed that flivver dove, Oscar II, to sail as a missionary ship of peace,

though we were never neutrals. No nation can be in a world flaming with war. It may not take up arms, but it is bound to take sides in the conflict.

Everyone knows what happened in April, 1917. We joined the Allies, and this whole nation went into the war, not simply the great armies we transported, but every man, woman and child in it served.

It is not for an old circuit-rider's wife to describe the transfiguration through which we passed during this period. I have always carried side arms as a Christian soldier, but this was another matter altogether. I was not equal to the situation. All I could do was to spin round and round in a circle somewhere inside and watch the world lay hold of Almighty God—when I had thought this world was dead in its trespasses and sins.

The members of Peter's church swarmed like bees into a state of violent activity. Mrs. Buckhart dropped her browbeaten poor people and went in for Red Cross service. She organized a chapter at Drumhead and worked us as if that was a sweatshop. Isobel Sangster took one look round and sailed out of it all for France to join a canteen. Peter was at last a preacher. He was exalted and he was sublime. He inspired his people with the wrath of the gospel against our enemies. He prayed with furious passion for the success of our arms. My son became a spiritual man imbued with a declamatory soul. And at last it seemed that we were not only permitted to

hate our enemies, it was our duty to do so. This felt very queer to me, but I did it. All along I had allowed myself a little latitude secretly for compassion toward all men who fell in battle, and toward all women who lost their husbands and sons; but now I felt obliged to quench my spirit and leave our enemies to the awful mercies of God.

This record has nothing to do with the war, however, except as this war affected my son and his church. He was now not only a preacher but an executive of so much ability that his services were constantly in demand for organizing war work and helping with the various drives for bonds and other funds. I began to entertain a fearful respect for Peter, and I sometimes interrupted the stream of battle prayers flowing into heaven, with a little petition that the Lord would forgive me for misjudging my own son. No one, I suppose, could conceive then what the effects of the war would be on our religious life. We only knew that everybody had been converted and believed in God, and our Armies in France. We sent the Almighty with them in our prayer. We had no revivals in the churches for the duration of the war, not one. We did not say it in so many words, but the idea was: "Lord, dismiss us from thy tender mercies, but be with our sons in France! Save them if thou canst, but give them the strength and courage to win this war." This was our faith, that the victory would settle everything.

And it transfigured this nation. We literally fulfilled the Scriptures. We were ready to spend everything, sacrifice everything. We lived as original men, in our deeds and emotions. We required a braver language. Fine old words like golden spears buried in the dust of centuries dark and deep must be found and set to martial music. We trod the measures of an epic.

Three hundred thousand of our young men fell in France. Nearly a hundred thousand died of their wounds. But there was no such thing as death. Nothing remained to be chosen but immortality. They made haste to choose it. They gave their lives as you offer a toast, joyfully, smiling over the brim of the cup that was to be broken presently.

We obtained the victory as much by faith in an ideal as by the force of our arms. But we did not win the kingdom of heaven, nor peace on earth, nor even the League of Nations to enforce it. This League of Nations turns out to be a sublime figment of the human imagination, too expensive to finance unless we continue to give all our goods to our poor relations in this league, and to be subject to the common devil of discord in all men.

Sometimes I feel sorry for Mr. Woodrow Wilson in my narrow way and strictly according to the Old Testament part of my faith in the Lord. He reminds me of a clean-shaven Moses who added fourteen fine points to the Ten Commandments and ac-

tually did lead one people and was by way of leading several other peoples with all the fervor of an evangelist and the brimstone anathemas of a prophet through the blazing wilderness of this world. But, like Moses, he only came in sight of the promised land. Because he had done something or other that he should not have done, the Lord permitted him just to have a glimpse of it from a high place as a sort of rebuke for not having behaved well enough to inherit it. I reckon that happens in a small way to all of us. We never do set foot on our promised lands. We just see them from afar, and die before we get there.

I am just a woman, gray and tired out and laid away a trifle uneasily in my Scriptures, but comfortable enough to feel that I can get along very well without changing my scenes to a new and strange promised land, even if it does flow with milk and honey. I never saw a land yet that produced only milk and honey just flowing. I doubt if Paradise does. We shall probably be obliged even there to keep on earning our eternal livelihood by dealing in stars or something to keep us occupied and out of mischief.

So, though I believed in this League of Nations as I believe in salvation, not that I ever felt entirely saved, I had my doubts about whether we could afford that much salvation in this present world. And I never did believe we could produce that much

harmony. I have not lived all my life in the Methodist itineracy without learning that Christian people with different creeds cannot pray and worship the Lord together in the same church. The very seat of perversity in a man is that place in his soul where he keeps his particular spiritual doctrine by which he will be saved, and no other. This household of nations contemplated by the league covenant seemed to me dangerously impractical. It is the same idea Ham, Shem and Japheth had of keeping house together for mutual protection and to cut down expenses. It will not work because either Ham, Shem or Japheth will not work, and becomes a dead expense with his whole family. And because even if they do work, they will not agree about the domestic details of this hodge-podge establishment. Some day, and very soon after they have shaken hands and said how glad they are to see each other and be fixed up so well for living happy ever after, there will be a family row, and one of the poor relations will get kicked out or one of the rich ones will strut out and found a house just close enough by to keep up the row.

I did my Red Cross duties and all my other duties very quietly during the war because I suffered much from this secret sin of unbelief in what it would accomplish.

Sometimes I went to a mass meeting where Peter was the chief speaker. He had a gift for public

speaking that you would never suspect from the sermons he preached. He was a perfect aëroplane of eloquence when it came to exciting the patriotic enthusiasm of a crowd. He made gestures, he stepped like a warhorse scenting battle. And he would let out something like this in the sonorous tones of a man who has a tempest in his breast: "The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution we have are not simply the creed of American liberty but they belong to the New Testament of the liberties of mankind, and if these Scriptures are violated the salvation of the world is in danger!"

Then the crowd would shout and Peter would pause to mop his face with his handkerchief. And I would feel my chin quiver and my countenance breaking up and the tears in my eyes, so that I would be obliged to take off my glasses and wipe them before I could see my son clearly. All that—yes; but at the same time the quiet, plain, bareheaded woman that I am in secret was sitting in the back door of my mind, doubting if it was so, what Peter said, what the people meant when they shouted, even the quality of the tears I was drying off my spectacles.

I used to go away by myself sometimes as you do when you are about to pray in secret—and not pray at all, but just sit and think the thoughts I wanted to think. When you have lived a long time under the impression that the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, and that his providences are not deter-

mined by the flurries in the minds and affairs of men it feels queer to realize suddenly that we have a religion for the duration of the war, which was not the kind we had before, nor of a nature to steady men's souls in the long siege of living in what we call peace because it is not war.

That phrase, "for the duration of the war," troubled me. If you change the laws, life and even religion of a nation to meet a great emergency, what I wanted to know was how we should change back again. Peter said that we should never be the same people again, and the world would never be the same world. It might not be better, but it certainly would be different. The individual man had disappeared off the face of the earth. If you saw one you only saw a digit of the great multiple of mankind. The terms we used were collective—peoples and nations. It was a hundred thousand of this and two hundred thousand of that, even if it was a matter of socks and sweaters. You might have only a dollar in your pocket, but you were obliged to think about so many million dollars' worth of canteen supplies or so many billion dollars' worth of bonds. We lost the strong sense of personal affections, and hate became an international term of inspiration. We were collected, organized, down to the last thought. My attributes would be your attributes, and yours would be everybody's. Our souls would be like black-eyed peas, all alike.

Now I never hoped to be better than other people, but we have the inalienable right to be different, at least as one man's nose differs from another man's nose. I stuck to that and to the prayers that fitted my own bowed head, merely mentioning this war to the Lord in the larger sentences at the end of my prayer, as I formerly reminded him of the heathens in the uttermost parts of the earth.

At last, and quite unexpectedly, the war ended and a great many of our best people were suddenly thrown out of employment. I have often wondered why in all the agitation that followed about providing emlpoyment for the millions of real workers turned out of the Army, shipyards and building branches there was no agitation at all about providing something to do for these workless people who had worked so hard during the war and had thus acquired for the first time habits of service. Millions of idle fashionable women were suddenly released and allowed to drift back into the innocuous and vicious diversions of their class, but with their minds stretched by big terms and big notions, current for the duration of the war.

Two weeks after the armistice was signed the Annual Conference of our church met. There were some queer doings at this Conference. The young Methodist preachers who had felt the call to go overseas with our troops as chaplains had been allowed to go. No one interfered with their consciences in

this matter. But when some of them returned in time to take work again at this Conference they had the same experience that the railroad strikers faced in New York recently when they decided to go back to work, and discovered that they had lost their seniority.

It was not Jesus but Paul who recommended the office of elders and bishops. I have always thought this was a very significant circumstance; not that you cannot be a Christian and walk softly before the Lord if you are a bishop, but it must be very hard to do it, and the temptation to swat a young preacher over the head sometimes for getting a call to leave the circuit you put him on to serve must be very strong.

Peter was sent to the First Church in this city. This is the best appointment in the Conference. And certainly Peter was better qualified to fill it than a young circuit rider who had done battlefield drudgery for the Lord succoring the wounded, comforting the despondent and praying for the dying, and writing their last letters home that their hearts might rest easy beneath the little white crosses of honor and sacrifice. That is emergency work, and does not fit a man to become the pastor of a big congregation nor to manage the affairs of a rich church.

Peter had the right experience. He was a smart young preacher, to begin with. He had proved ac-

ceptable to the exacting and fashionable congregation at Drumhead. His war work had given him a practical course in financing on a large scale. He knew all the latest methods of organizing. He had studied the psychology of propaganda as his father studied the power of God unto salvation. He was now familiar with all classes of men, not as a pastor but as a promoter of bonds, patriotism and service. He had been obliged to use the policies of business men and he already had an intellectual man's tolerance. Finally, he had a recent and notable record as a popular speaker. This is the best preacher to choose for a big church with an enormous membership, representing all classes, from millionaires to laborers and paupers. Such a church is remarkably democratic. I do not know any other organization in the world that anybody can join with the same impunity.

I will not go so far as to say that I had given Peter up by this time, but I was confused. The world did not appear to me to be safe, but it might be. If the churches were spiritual it was on such a large scale I could not comprehend it, but they might be. If Peter had any communion with the Holy Spirit, if he wrestled in prayer for the souls of his people, he did not show the signs William used to have of the struggle. But I had to admit that he assumed the duties of this terrific pastorate with

soberness and courage. It required more than usual firmness on my part to unpack Kitto's Commentaries and place them in the handsome library we had now, because the stewards of Peter's church frequently called on him there. Well, let him explain the best way he could. At least they were not Balzac's novels.

But I took the old box of sermons up into the attic. My faith in them had not failed, but my hope that Peter would read and study them had failed at last. So I just sat the old box up there under the window, sat down beside it for a little while and thought of William. How different his ministry had been, how hard his life had been, how little success he had, measured by these new church standards; and how different everything had been with Peter, who could not hold a light to his father when it came to preaching the gospel and telling men the truth with courage about their sins.

I always became a little heated and resentful when I compared Peter with his father. So now I took off my glasses, wiped the widow's tears from them, snapped them back on and went downstairs, stepping strong with my head up.

As it happened, I passed Peter in the hall, and I passed him as if he were not there, which is not my custom. I usually call him "my son" or give him the blessing of a mother's look, but this time

I did not turn my head, and I made my skirts swish the way a woman will when her sails are set against the weather.

"Mother!" I heard him exclaim.

"Yes, Peter," I answered as if Peter was the gnat on the bull's horn.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded, overtaking me.

"I am thinking of your father, my son," I answered coldly. "He was a great preacher and he was sent to be the pastor of the poor. He suffered everything. You are not a great preacher, and you are sent to be the pastor of the prosperous. And you do not suffer, but you have everything. You are like a rich man, Peter!"

He laughed; he would do that, turn my point against him on his smile. He stepped close to me and drew my head to his breast.

"There is nobody like you left in this world, mother," he began, still laughing. "You are still jealous for father."

"No, not that——"

"Yes," he interrupted. "You are not father's widow. You are still the arc and covenant of his faith, his way and his preaching. Spare me a little of your confidence."

"You have my confidence, and I wish you had your father's faith," I answered.

"Sometimes, just lately, I wish that, too, mother," he said soberly.

He must have had some premonition of what this coming year held for him. Your Gethsemane can be anywhere.

CHAPTER IV

In the old days, when William was a young preacher on the new ground circuits in the mountain regions of our Conference, we lived in little weather-beaten parsonages far out in the country, and our nearest neighbor was never another family, but one of William's churches.

I was often lonely, especially when he was away at some distant appointment. The only thing you can say for a church as your nearest neighbor is that it is there, on a higher, greener hill, and that it stands for the best you can hope for or believe, but it never looks across the road and speaks to you when you are sitting alone on your doorstep at night wishing and listening and wondering how you can go on bearing this silence. It just stands with its belfry sticking up toward the other, brighter worlds overhead, terribly white and still in the darkness. The tall tombstones and the lowlier ones stick up behind it; or they lean a little, not as if they were falling, but trying to escape. Sometimes at night, when there were no voices, no wheels rumbling along the road, no bells tinkling in the distant pastures, the wind used to whisk by on its business and blow

shadows across these tombs, glistening in the moonlight, so that they seemed to stir and move like long wing feathers and short closer feathers scattered about that church.

During these first years, when I was still very young and only recently married out of the world into the gospel, William frequently asked if I was afraid to be alone in the parsonage until he returned the next day. And I always assured him that I was not afraid. The bravest thing to do when you are not brave is to profess courage and act accordingly.

So I always sent William forth to his appointment with a peaceful mind. When he was mounted on his horse I used to run out sometimes, place my foot on his in the stirrup and he would reach down, draw me up, bend over and kiss me. That would be my young husband, but the priest in him invariably looked back over his shoulder and said something like this: "Remember, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

That might be so, but as he disappeared at a smart canter down the road Israel seemed a long way off. And this way he had of consigning me to the care of just the God of Israel was not so comforting as he imagined. He had the advantage of me. He had the witness of the Spirit. He was never alone anywhere. I had no such experience. I reckon the closest I came to the kingdom of heaven, or Israel, or any of the Scriptural countries, was the

sense I had of union with William, who was a citizen of them. I am being hand-raised by his gospel, so to speak, but it was not the same as having fearless faith. And even to this day I seem always to lay my hand confidently in William's faith like a clasp when I pray.

But at the time of which I write the promise of life everlasting did not satisfy my heart. I wanted the companionship of people who lived and laughed. I used to grow weary of the long peace of the hills, of the quiet days and the still nights. I wanted to take a journey somewhere, anywhere, so it should be a long and swift one. But I never could go and leave William. I felt as close to him as the rib in his side. I had the conceit that he needed me, someone whom he did not have to pray to be present, but who was always literally there in the flesh to care for him on the sly when he did not know he could be comforted at all except by his Lord.

When I was oppressed beyond endurance by this long imprisonment of my traveling mind in some lonely country parsonage, I remember practicing a certain illusion when he was away on his circuit. I might be sitting on the front doorstep as usual in the moonlit night, but I would imagine myself starting off on just the earth through space. It was moving with incredible velocity, rocking from side to side in its orbit, with the furious oscillations of this spinning speed, making it dark when it turned one

way and light when my side swung back beneath the sun. I would sit and imagine how fast I was going until my head was swimming. Then I forgot the church across the way, all the little things and the little pathways up and down the hills of my days and William's days. I could look back at the stars and feel myself swaying at the thought of how many we were leaving behind, mere specks of light on the horizon. I thought of the roar of far-off constellations as I passed; just myself, you understand, of all the world of men, taking this journey through immeasurable spaces, sitting on my own doorstep, because it was the only way I could leave home.

William never knew of this star riding I used to do in his absence, for I was always there when he returned, with no sign in my manner of the terrific flight I had made, doing my household duties or watching for him, very prim and demure, with not a hair of my head blown out of place. You may do very queer things in the spirit without its being seen or heard of.

So many years have passed since then. My star traveling imagination settled down long ago. But now, seated here in Peter's big church on Sunday mornings, like a very placid period of an old woman at the end of a long sentence, my thoughts went back to those first days on the lonely circuits, when the only house in sight was the church across the road,

when the season changed from winter weather and the Lord said "Yea! Yea!" to the little green leaves, and they answered from every tiny bud and bough. And they changed the sound of the wind to sweetness with the grace of their dipping and turning. To me it was like having young company all about the parsonage.

I do not know why this vast congregation reminded me of that, unless it was that these people were no company. They gathered like a strange phenomenon of life every Sunday morning in this church, so many strangers, no bond binding them to each other, and dissolving, disappearing at the end of an hour. Then you could not find them. You did not know where they lived, nor how. The whole thing was too big for me. It was like trying to read humanity in diamond type to look at this sea of faces, so different from the little flocks I had known. I could distinguish a foreigner from an American by the way his mustaches sat up like an offense on his face, but I could not see a single woman that looked like the president of the missionary society, nor any girls with the faces of prayer-meeting virgins. And for the first time in my life I could not recognize a steward by the way he looked or the place where he sat in this church.

Only one man shouted "Amen!" when Peter prayed. He was an old bald-headed person with an apostrophe nose and a chin beard cut as square as

a shingle, who had apparently been banished to the front bench, which he inhabited alone. I supposed that he was the leading steward until I learned that he was only a carpenter brought over from the past before this became a really great church.

I had a strange enlightenment as to the manifold characters of a steward when Peter introduced Mr. Cathcart, an elderly katydid sort of man, who wore a sage-green suit of clothes and a sky-blue cravat. He was a club man, a capitalist and the chairman of Peter's board of stewards! Maybe these people were good, but the best goodness I have known never looked so prosperous and worldly. How distant all that plain piety of the hills, and how long ago it seemed now since I had heard the road of constellations swinging the curves of my dreams in these quieter places beneath the other stars!

Peter, however, was in no way confounded. He had the assurance of an able preacher. And these people liked him. More and more he impressed me as a good business man of the gospel, at the head now of a really great business with nearly a thousand workers under him. He had a financial committee. He made bills and O. K.'d bills. He saw printers. He had a secretary and two deaconesses.

This is as good a place as any to set down the way the presiding elder has of checking up the work of preachers under him. Each pastor in his district receives a list of printed questions. I have counted

them. There are seventy-three in all. The preacher in charge is required to answer them and turn the list in at each Quarterly Conference. Here is a sample of these questions:

"How many revivals have you held this year?"

"Who did the preaching?"

"How many sermons have you preached this year?"

"How many homes have you visited?"

"In how many homes have you held prayer? (Each time should be counted.)"

"How many infants have you baptized? (Do you preach it in the homes?)"

"In your opinion will the charge pay out?"

And so on and so forth. There is nothing private left between a preacher and just his Lord when he has answered these questions. He cannot have a single secret prayer with a sinner without setting it down in the credit column of his account book with the presiding elder. But the authorities of the church can get a quarterly weather report of the condition and finances of the whole church, as the Government gets crop reports. It must be right. I have nothing to say against the arrangement, but it does seem queer for a preacher out making pastoral calls to credit himself with them, and maybe a prayer or two, or a good deed. No power on earth could have made William do it. He would have lied about his prayers and his alms. But Peter was obliged to call

in help before his Quarterly Conference, to add up the things that had been done in the Lord's name. I used to wonder if he gave his deaconesses credit for all the prayers they said. Maybe they were allowed to be decently silent about their little petitions among the poor.

This was the winter of 1918-19, when the scourge of influenza swept over the country. The churches, schools and theaters were closed. Thousands died of the disease in this city. It was especially fatal among the poor. There were two hundred cases at one time among this class of members in Peter's church, respectable people who worked, but who only managed a living wage in these high-price hard times of war prosperity.

The first year William and I were in the itinerancy there was an epidemic of some kind on the Red-wine circuit. And there were not enough well people to nurse the sick. We did it. We went from house to house, some of them miles apart, in the dead hours of the night to care for these afflicted ones. William comforted the dying and I helped lay out the dead. We did not go home until the survivors were convalescing. Then we both came down with the disorder and were near to death ourselves. I do not remember that we experienced any exalted sense of self-sacrifice in exposing ourselves performing this

service. My recollection is that we did it as a matter of course.

Peter managed his epidemic of influenza differently. I thought, of course, we would devote ourselves to nursing the sick, but he would not hear to it. I must not expose myself. He would not expose himself unnecessarily. If he performed his duty as pastor of that church he could not afford to come down with influenza. Besides, the church had a committee whose business it was to meet this emergency. There was no need to risk our lives when it could be attended to more efficiently and scientifically by people who were trained to do it. He called a meeting of his relief committee. They organized the work, provided food to nourish the sick, and established kitchens where it might be prepared and sent to families stricken with the disease. They imported a unit of nurses and the church kept a doctor during this epidemic.

I did my share of the work in one of the kitchens, but I never got over feeling queer and mean about sending soup to sick people's doors and not going in myself to see how they were getting on, to straighten the bedclothes, shake up their pillows, and tell them I could see they were mending fast.

I am not saying that all this was not done by those skillful nurses whom we commandeered directly from the Red Cross. I admit that this is a wonderful and mobile organization, which can be sent here or there

to put down a disease as a regiment of soldiers is sent to quell a riot or to keep a strike within the bounds of law and order, but it does seem to me that the trend of our times is to form corporations to attend to our humanitarian duties in the same impersonal and efficient way that other business is conducted. We have syndicated those Scriptures about the Good Samaritan. Instead of doing the job ourselves, we telephone to the United Charities or to a hospital. Maybe it is all right, but it does not feel so close and humanly kind to hire someone else to take your risks and do your good deeds. That used to be personal to you.

I doubt if in the long run it will have the same effect on Christian character to merely contribute to charity. It says plainly in the Scriptures that you are to perform these services yourself. I never can bring myself to believe that it comes to the same thing if you pay some one else to do it, even if it is better done. The truth is that it is not altogether better done. Why do people dread hospitals so much? Why do the poor shrink so persistently from the hired ministrations to their ills and poverty? There is a reason, my masters! It is not all based on ignorance and prejudice. They miss the human touch of personal compassion. They are the objects of charity, not of love. There is a difference.

There was a sick woman who fell to my care during this time. She was not a member of Peter's

church, and I doubt if she was a good woman. We had a kitchen on one of the poorer streets, and we were sending meals to the people in that neighborhood who had influenza. Word came one day that a woman was very ill in a room in a tenement house near by. Every nurse we had was already overworked. The doctor went once. He said it was wiser to give his care to those who might recover. The impression I had was that he meant not much would be lost if this woman died, so I slipped up there.

She was a girl, no more. Her finery was scattered like radiant filth about the wretched room. She was lying in the bed, very still, as one lies listening, waiting for something, her bright hair sticking to her head like a tangled web of gold, her lips red with fever, her face pinched and white, blue eyes staring out of it, meek with an awful terror.

It was not the things that I did, though I did everything. It was that I called her "my dear" and patted her softly as we do our children when we put them to sleep. She was far past any repose. She was alive with the awful energy of death. The only thing she said to me was: "Don't go! Don't leave me!"

So I called Peter over the phone and told him that I was very busy, and would not be home until I came.

Then I sat down by this little immortal rag's bed

and made the most of the time she had left. I have a good many kind Scriptures laid away in my mind, as you keep soft white things to cover you and comfort you when you are not very well, or strong enough to bear harsher things. I said them over to her, as you tell a bedtime tale to a child who will sleep presently. I made her own confession for her, not troubling her with questions. I took her sins for granted. Nothing mattered now about all that. She would now have a long time in which to do the will of God. There was only one little thing to do, so easy, that she should be wishful for her Lord and believe in him, being sorry for her transgressions. Nothing much was going to happen, I told her. She would scarcely notice it the next morning. It was so natural to live again after death.

Once or twice the dumb terror in her eyes had the best of me, so I had to keep the tears out of my own with an effort. But it would never do to show the white feather of grief now. I remained firm and confident. I chanted Rock of Ages as if it was my natural speech, not a song we sing, until I began to feel a little like a good kind old rock myself.

I do not know if it was the failing fires of life, the gray embers of death overlying the blue flame, but it seemed to me I saw ease in her eyes at last, a sort of pale peace.

I have never wished to meet my Lord alone at the

very last. I hope I shall be able to look over my shoulder and refer to my friends that their love may recommend me to him. I cannot think that I shall be entirely sure of myself. I shall be anxious about my deeds done in the body. I have a fear that I may forget my virtues, and that I should like to hear them extolled by good people after they think I am too far passed to hear this kind praise. But if they give it my very dust will hear it. How I have wished for love and praise all my life, just to hear the things that people never say of you until you are out of the competition of living with them in this world.

Thus I let my heart so shine to this girl. I made myself a cloud of witnesses for her comfort and assurance. She might have lived if I had known what to do, but I had her satisfaction of knowing that she died warm and befriended. So many victims of this disease that winter did not. People thought they must be careful. If you had it they sent you soup or flowers according to your station in life, and remained at a safe distance.

Now if it is so very important to live they were right; but I doubt if it is of the uttermost importance, just to save your own life. William never thought so. He used to take this Scripture, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it," round with him like

a charm when he had some risk to run or a hard duty to perform.

It is my secret and scornful belief that many people are in danger of disinfecting themselves out of the kingdom of heaven in their effort to escape a mere physical contagion.

This is one of the reasons why charity is no longer a private Christian virtue. It has become humanitarianism, one of the big businesses. It is administered by this board of directors, or that board, not given secretly from man to man. If you provide a hospital for the poor you have not fulfilled the law, and you will probably be damned one way or the other. This is the law—that you shall know your poor by name; that you shall visit those in affliction, even if they are not widows and orphans; that you shall contribute to their comfort without letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing, much less the reporters. You cannot cheat your fellow man with impersonal provisions for his misfortune. He has a heart under his ragged shirt. You are required to communicate with that. The endowing of an eleemosynary institution for the poor is only paying a tax which you owe in a country where you have made a fortune. You owe it, therefore you do not give it. You have simply discharged an obligation, not to the poor but to the laws and institutions of a country which provides the conditions and protects your interests while you are exercising

your wits making this fortune. But it is no proof at all that you are a Christian man, only a decently honest one. The man who we know is a Christian is one who comes over and gives you a day's work if your crops are in the grass and you are in the bed sick of a fever, because he has nothing else to give and really cannot spare this day from his own crop. Or he keeps the undertaker from cheating your widow in the price of the cheap pine coffin if you die of that fever. I have seen Christians like this, thousands of them, and my belief is that they exercise more influence for good over the life of this nation than many mere philanthropists, though the thunder of their benefactions never deafens the ears of the world. Their little old homely deeds are barefooted and they do not make a noise when they cross the threshold of your house. But they do come when you are not able or are too proud to stand in line for help before one of these institutions endowed for your relief, if by the skin of your teeth you can prove that you deserve to be received there.

What I am saying may sound like an old pea rattling in a gourd, the views of a narrow-minded old woman who does not realize that times have changed and that great provisions must be made to meet great needs. Still, the Lord does not change, and according to his word charity belongs to the retail department of the Christian religion. And I

feel obliged to stick to this—nothing is charity that you do not do with your own hands and with your own heart. We are developing a class of religious magnets in this country; the effect of their generosity is to put the small Christian deed out of countenance and to encourage us to look to them as a sort of immediate providence which is strictly financial. Never before has the Christian religion had so much capital behind it, and never before was it so near to being merely an international fund for making us more comfortable in this present world.

Peter preached this kind of gospel with such moving eloquence that I was uneasy sometimes lest the people who came to hear him might forget that this was not a rally in the interest of higher living and more giving, and that they would break out in open applause. He used the Lord's mighty Scriptures in this business to encourage these men and women to keep up their wartime enthusiasm until everybody had a job, every child an education, every sick man a bed, and every street woman a comfortable home—all to be achieved by funds and good conduct. The thing he left out was, "By my spirit, thus saith the Lord."

Peace, dear brethren, does not bring peace after all. It is only the statues raised to commemorate victories that are winged and beautiful. Victory herself invariably comes home to us with a tragic face, disheveled, maimed, bearing the scars of many

wounds, reduced in fortune, anxious for the future —and all of us face to face once more with the graver faults of our civilization.

So now, in this winter of 1918-19, with the war ended and the world not nearly so safe as we had been led to believe it would be, with peace standing round waiting to come in and change its uniform to civilian clothes, and take off its cork leg and get a good rest, every man got busy according to his own spirit and according to his notion of his own particular salvation. Thus we were torn asunder by the awful multiple of spirits, and we were led not at all by the one everlasting Spirit.

I cannot say how it was in other churches, but Peter's church became a seething caldron of every kind of unrest. There was for a time a sort of human smoke on the back benches after the workman who had been employed in the shipyards came home. These men had been members, were still, but in spite of Peter's courageous sermons urging them to take up the ways of peace and go to work at it they disappeared out of that church like smoke that a wind drives. And they would not work, not for the wages peace can afford to pay. They would have ten dollars a day for three dollars' worth of labor or they would not labor.

Then the soldiers began to drift in from overseas, scarred young veterans with considerable indignation in their hearts about the way free men had been

made to obey military discipline in the Army. They did not mind fighting and dying, but they were mad as hornets, to a man, about this obedience business. And they were determined to take a furlough. There was a committee in Peter's church to provide employment for these dear boys. There was no difficulty about finding jobs for them. The difficulty was in persuading some of them to take these jobs. No, thanks! They had saved the country; they would whiff round and enjoy the country a bit. Where was that fatted calf? With what sardonic youthful humor they must have read every morning in the papers about the efforts of the various employment agencies and committees to rustle jobs for them.

Then came the strikes—the steel strike and the coal strike, and ten thousand local strikes. The railroad shopmen and the street-car men and the shipping clerks, all struck one after another in this city. There were men in every one of these unions who belonged to Peter's church.

Peter bestirred himself. He took a hand. He was all things to all men in this crisis. He scarcely took time for his meals. He was off to a committee meeting, or he had to see a man, or two or three men. He really expected to exert some influence. But strikers do not like preachers. A preacher is one of the misgivings they have in the order they have set up for themselves. I never knew but one

preacher who was popular with them, and he was an agitator who covered his malfeasance with Old Testament derogatory Scriptures. He preached on the rent problem and the high cost of living. His picture appeared in the newspapers almost as regularly as if he had taken a patent medicine and was now a part of the advertisement of this nostrum. There is a queer thing about some small dangerous men—they are made manifest not by their own works but by a crowd or a riot. They are safe only because of this vicious protection. This man was like that.

I had no fear that Peter would go so far. He was for harmony, not discord. But the chairman of his board of stewards was that old valentine of a man who wore a sage-green suit and controlled the stock in the street-railway company. This fact was enough to make the strikers distrust Peter. Every time he urged them to compromise and yield a point or two, they regarded him as the emissary of that capitalist. And if he went back to Cathcart, this chairman of his board of stewards and Peter's pet capitalist, Cathcart would give him to understand genially but firmly that his good offices were not appreciated. It is one thing to tread water in a church row, and quite another thing to oil them between labor and capital. Peter could manage a church choir with every songster in it tearing the other fellow's hair, but he could do nothing with these motor-

men, nor with Cathcart. Still, he kept at it with Christian perversity, making himself such a nuisance that I was anxious lest he should get his name in the papers as a pernicious peacemaker. Peter was by his table as the Methodist Church is by its altar on communion Sunday. Any man may take the sacrament there, no matter to what denomination he belongs, or even if he is not a member of any church, if for the moment he thinks he is in love and charity with his neighbor. So Peter would invite anybody, from a hungry beggar to a senator dead in his trespasses and sins, to dine with us. During this season of strikes we were constantly entertaining belligerent motormen and mechanics.

I must say that I felt drawn to these men. They were more familiar to me than most of the people in Peter's church. They reminded me of the angry brethren with whom William used to deal and pray until they forgave each other. Sometimes I tried to join in the discussion between Peter and one of these fierce guests.

Maybe I would raise my hand soothingly and say something like this: "Did you say you are earning a dollar an hour, Mr. Hardit?"

Whereupon Hardit, who was a shop mechanic, would give me a three-dollar nod of indignation.

"Then it cannot be so bad," I would return. "Now my husband and I used to do very well on——"

But I was never allowed to tell how little William and I lived on. Our guest would stand on his hind legs at once and begin to count off the children he had, and what he paid for shoes and doctors' bills, especially what the dentist cost. All his children had teeth, he had teeth, and his wife had a plate of false teeth! How much did I think it cost to maintain the teeth in a family of six?

I was always a trifle flustered by this question. My plates were made so many years ago, when you could get a good double set of them for twenty-five dollars. And it has been so long since real teeth entered into the problem of existence with me that I have had no experience with modern dentists. But it does seem strange to me how everybody tears round these days about just his teeth. The human tooth is under suspicion. It turns out to be the root of all evil in the body. If you go to the doctor with a pain in your knee he sends you to the dentist, who gags you, taps your teeth, chooses the best molar you have or maybe the only two you have that hit, and yanks them out. Therefore, your knee will be well. This does not follow. I am as innocent of teeth as a new born babe, but I have a knee that still aches like a tooth in bad weather.

I always felt a trifle nervous about being "raised a spiritual body" in the next world. It sounds thin and unsubstantial, as if I should not be noticed much or have other spiritual bodies bow pleasantly to me

as I passed, because they might not see me passing. But there is one advantage—we shall never have to call the doctor. It is our corruption that makes his fortune. I do not say there will be no doctors in heaven, but all the signs indicate that none of them will be doctors after they get there.

One evening during a very serious strike of the railway shop mechanics Peter came in with another guest, whom he introduced as Mr. Kleffler. The moment I set eyes on this man I knew that he was different. He might be a heathen or a poet, but he was no born-and-bred American. And I could see that he was not one of Peter's beloved strikers. A striker has hard red hands, horned knuckles, stubbed finger nails, muscles that crawl under his sleeve when he makes a gesture at you; and he never gestures at random, his arm oratory is straight from the shoulder and in your direction. Also, he has an honest bitter brow, coruscated with wrinkles that you can read and know they mean work, exposure and at present a bad temper.

This Kleffler was a frail man who had evidently escaped the workingman's hardships. His body was thin. His dark blue suit fitted him as if it had originally fitted a larger man and did not care about being on this one at all. His shirt was not clean. His collar was exhausted. His hair was long and laid back from his brow like a black flourish. His hands were very white, sickly looking, but active.

They flew up and seemed to make faces at you whenever he said anything. I did not like his hands, which are as revealing a part of the countenance of a man as his nose is. And I did not like his eyes. There was a bright silence in them, like a secret laugh at your expense. But a man cannot help having what looks like a raveled body sometimes; or a head that is two numbers too large for it; or even a malicious eye, if he inherits it. So I asked him to come in to the fire and get warm. I said the weather was very cold. He said yes, it was cold, and sat down, thrusting first one foot, then the other toward the blazing grate.

While he was doing this he swung a glance round the room. It was the impudent look of a bailiff who estimates the value of your things because he will be back to-morrow to get them.

"They make you very comfortable," he said.

I thought this was a queer thing to say, but I answered that they did, that this was the best parsonage we ever had, and I was about to go on to tell him about the parsonages William and I used to live in when Peter interrupted me. He wanted to know if there had been any telephone calls for him. I told him, and took the hint. Peter frequently interrupts me when I am about to tell something that I ought not tell or repeat something that I have already told several times before.

So I sat quietly on the other side of the fireplace

with my skirts smoothed out and my glasses fixed politely on Kleffler until I heard Peter calling the numbers I had given him on the phone. Then I asked Kleffler if he lived in the city. He said no, and added after a slight hesitation that he was from Chicago—as if on the spur of the moment this was the place he chose to be from, though I did not interpret it that way at the time. I asked him if he was married, because I always think if you know whether a stranger is married you know something about him. He said yes, as if he said yes he was married in a way.

I asked him if he had any children, because I always think if a stranger says he has a family you know something good about him. He replied that he did have children. I remarked encouragingly that he appeared to be young, hoping he would tell me how many children he had. He astonished me. He said he had six. And he could not have been a day older than Peter, who was thirty-three.

Another hour passed before I discovered what kind of a man we had in the house, but I may as well call attention to this curious fecundity of radicals here. Nearly every time one of them gets the much desired publicity of appearing before an investigating committee he proves to be the father of from six to nine children, all born, no doubt, with red topknots on their heads and with no chance at all to become honest God-fearing men and women. If there is any

way, I think they should be vaccinated morally and kept out of the Rand School.

I was considering whether I should ask Kleffler what church he attended, which is a delicate way of asking a stranger if he believes in God and his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, when I heard the phone click as Peter hung up the receiver.

"What church do you attend, Mr. Kleffler?" I asked hurriedly.

I had just time to catch a queer sort of grin on his face before Peter came in and headed me off with some remark to him about the postponement of a meeting, where, I gathered from what followed, Kleffler was to have made an address.

"Now," Peter said, sitting down and smiling amiably at him, "we shall have time to talk it over. You can do all the good in the world here if you will only tell the men the right thing."

I did not see the right thing in Kleffler's eye, but I caught at this news that he was some kind of speaker. I wanted to know what kind.

"Do you lecture?" I asked politely.

"I teach," he answered grimly.

Then Peter shot me another look as if he said "Mother!" And I subsided into the silence which I am compelled to keep always in the same chair with me.

When you are old, but not nearly so dead as your nearest and dearest think you are, and the world is

spinning and doing things it never did before, you do crave to know what is going on; and no one tells you, because what is the use of upsetting you at your age? I reckon this is why elderly people ask so many questions. It is the only way we can find out enough to live and think on. And it certainly is the quickest way. Many a time if Peter left me alone in the room with some one I should know more about that person when he came back than he ever imagined or dreamed was so. But for some reason he was determined to keep me out of Kleffler's confidence. I was the more curious because I began to see that he did not himself approve of this man, but that he was preparing to take him dead or alive in an argument.

Dinner was announced at this moment. And it went off very fast, that dinner. I could not tell whether Peter was hurrying to remove his guest to the safer territory of his study, or if it was because Kleffler took his food coming and going, so to speak, and we were obliged to keep up with him. But it was apparent that Peter was determined he should not talk about whatever it was that Kleffler wished to discuss.

By this time I was vaguely suspicious. I gave Kleffler his coffee and tried to forgive him for keeping the spoon in his cup. If you are a good man it is no sin to allow your spoon to stand up like a naked mast in your coffee, or even to take your food ob-

soletely with your knife. But if you are not a good man everything is evidence against you. I was discovering as fast as I could that I did not like this man. The spirit in me was beginning to rise. Peter felt it, because he began to say pleasant, teasing things to me, the way he does when he knows I am about to fire, and must be kept soothed with the choicest filial compliments if my aim is distracted.

Kleffler escaped as the plates were being changed for dessert. He had been suppressed as long as he could be. He had ideals. He was the traveling salesman of these ideals, and he must show them. He had the habit of eloquence. He said several noble things that made my flesh creep. He told Peter that old orders were passing away. The people were at last coming to understand what the brotherhood of man meant. Within five years at the longest he thought the struggle would be ended.

"Mankind will have become adjusted to mankind, not to illusions, and we shall hold all things in common!" he exclaimed. "Then, my dear sir," he added, looking at Peter, "we shall have no more strikes. There will be no longer any question of wages, because there will be no capital with which to pay wages. We shall not need it. We shall have everything!"

All my life I have kept the back of my hand, spiritually speaking, to riches. If I have been for anybody it is the poor; if I am against anybody it is

the rich. But what this man had just said sounded to me more dangerous than blasphemy. I looked at him. He returned this look with a sort of forked-tongued merriment in his black eyes. He widened his grin until his nose seemed to flatten like the head of an adder. I smelled the thoughts of vipers. Not until this moment did I recognize him. Peter, my son and a preacher, had brought a red radical into a Methodist parsonage!

Now I can dine with anybody. I have done it, but I draw the line at unnatural things. And this man was no longer a man to me. He looked too much like the pale devouring worm of himself. He stood for the rape of Russia, for that strange uncleanness of mind and soul of which we were hearing so much by this time. He was the universal rogue, he had a predatory instinct toward every virtue. He professed peace and made war in the dark. He was the black death of civilization, and he was sitting at my table!

I laid down my fork and folded my napkin, then I put both hands against the edge of the table and drove my chair back.

"Peter!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, mother," he answered, very much embarrassed, "will you excuse us?"

"I will. I was about to ask you to excuse me," I answered coldly.

They went out. Kleffler was laughing. He was

not ashamed. He was pleased to show the nakedness of his reptilian mind to an old woman. Her horror amused him.

I have never acquired the habit of eavesdropping; but I have heard many a petition through a keyhole that William thought he was making to his Lord in secret, because I wanted to know what was the matter with William so that I might know what to do for him. And now that my son was holding converse with the adversary I wanted to know what was going on.

His study was across the hall from the parlor. The door was open. I went into the parlor and opened that door, not wide, but enough for the human voice to pass through.

They were discussing the strike. Kleffler claimed the credit of having fomented it. He said you could make men do anything if you could make them believe something. He said there would be very few strikes merely for the present good the men hoped to get out of them, but it was the hope they had of disrupting the whole economic system, and of one day controlling trade, markets, transportation and all public utilities. It was the business of him and of others like him to confirm them in this faith.

"If we did not succeed in that," I heard him say, "we should never pull off but one strike in any one industry, because, of course, you know a strike never

pays, even if the strikers win. It costs too much. But we keep up this missionary work among the workers everywhere, and we can always go back and call another one."

"Do you really believe this doctrine yourself?" I heard Peter ask him.

"It is not to believe, but to make the other fellows believe it," Kleffler answered.

"There is Russia——" in Peter's voice.

"Not a fair experiment. As soon as we can wear out a few governments like this one and England, break down capital, we can put it over like a shot!" the other laughed.

"But you can never do that," Peter again.

"We are doing it. The honor system among men is weakening. The idea is to destroy the morale, tear things up. That the workingman is demanding shorter and shorter hours is the smallest part of our plan. We are teaching him to be destructive, to harry his employer, to nibble his reputation, destroy confidence in him. It is a sort of universal sabotage at which we aim. Nothing you can put your finger on, but a crumbling under our fingers that goes on all the time."

Peter was silent. I heard the other man get up. I knew he was standing before the fireplace because I could hear the click of his heels against the tiles.

"It is taking hold, this idea of destruction. It appeals to something long repressed and controlled in

the minds of men," he went on. "The clerks in the stores, are they so anxious as formerly to sell their employers' goods? They are not. But he pays them more. You employ a man. Does he earn his wage? Certainly not. But you must pay it. You have a big factory with half a million dollars' worth of machinery in it. If our men keep some part of it out of order can you fill your contracts? You have a farm. But have we not raised the standard of wages until you must pay twice as much for half a man? There will be no whole workingman left; we are dividing them. Well, what is happening? As we progress in efficiency of propaganda this wastage will increase in volume.

"You do not realize it yet, but we have the advantage of you so long as you have anything that can be wasted or destroyed. When you have not you will join our ranks. You must. That is what we count on. Our object is to destroy confidence, your confidence in the man who works for you, his confidence in you. Thus we will destroy credit, and without credit or confidence how will you do business? How long will property last? Or your Government, or your boasted religion, which is the frailest illusion of all?"

"No!" I heard Peter exclaim. "That cannot happen. Even admitting your infamous plan works, which I do not for a moment concede, so much misfortune will drive men the more earnestly to seek

that which always remains, the consolation of religion."

"You think so," Kleffler retorted, "but you think so in the face of facts. The churches are not winning, they are losing; they will lose half a million members this year. You see we—we are offering mankind a salvation he can see with his eyes, taste with his lips, feel on his back!"

"I don't understand that you are," Peter answered.

"Yes, all that he can take," the other said.

"But not earn," Peter put in.

"That is your word, not mine," the other laughed.

"What will become of the weak?"

"What does become of them in Nature? They die and fertilize the strong. Your foolish sentimentalities, your pious charities, your laws growing out of these sickly emotions have filled the world with weak people, incompetents, a frightful and senseless burden! Well, they will pass. When we are done only the terribly competent and strong will survive."

Peter said something that I did not catch, about honor and mercy.

"Terms used to conjure with," Kleffler answered. "We shall leave them out of our minds. It is all about you, this new order, forming, drawing out, clearing the way; and you do not see it. Even the children have it. The other day five hundred school children struck in one of your cities. Did you notice

that? We have our word everywhere. The easiest people to teach are those who do not know that they are being taught. What you call your ignorant classes. They are becoming learned," he laughed.

I have read Job, but never before have I heard Satan in the flesh speaking.

What Peter answered him in reply I do not set down. It was the argument of an honest man who believed in law and religion. But it is useless to offer righteousness to the devil. There is no common ground upon which you can meet him. He is unspeakable and unthinkable.

Finally I heard Peter talking, very low. He went on for a long time. I could not hear what he said, only a short laugh from Kleffler now and then. But I could tell that Peter was using a good man's cussing voice. They have it, every one of them, a curious authority for telling a man that he must and shall be damned. I reckon Peter was saying something along that line, because presently Kleffler came walking with a jerky step toward the door.

"All right, I'll go," he said, snickering, "but I'll be in your church to change it, in your house to break it, in your pockets to empty them, and in your Government to destroy it. You cannot get rid of me by turning me out of your door. I am everywhere."

Then I heard him slam it and run down the steps into the street.

I went to close the parlor door, passing a window that overlooked this street. I saw two men move from behind the wall of the next house and join this man. They seemed to be very intimate and went away arm and arm with him.

After closing the door very softly I came back, sat down in my corner beside the fire and waited for my son. I was crocheting a mat for the center table. This was to be a mark I would leave of myself in this parsonage—that did not have a single hand-made thing in it.

Presently Peter came in. He looked years older. His face was pale and drawn like a man who has seen a terrible vision. He dropped into the chair on the other side of the fire and stared at the coals.

I went on crocheting, pretending not to notice the change in him, feeling that the sight of me there, serene and undisturbed, about to go to my prayers and bedtime peace, was the best thing I could do for him.

"Mother," he said after a while, without looking up, "evil forces are at work everywhere."

"They always have been, my son," I answered quietly.

"But not with brains. They were blind forces, instincts, appetites. Now it is different. Evil has become a science."

"I never respected the sciences as you do, Peter," I replied. "There is just one knowledge that counts,

the knowing of his will. There is one duty, the doing of his will."

"It sounds simple, but it is not simple," he returned.

"If this world could have been damned the devil would have accomplished that long ago. He cannot do it, my son."

Peter was silent. I do not think he heard what I said. It filled his ears like an old song which you do not really hear. But I know this was a good thing because I had it from William, who was always pulling Satan's tail and injuring his reputation when he had the chance.

Then, looking over my glasses at Peter, who had his face in his hands like a defeated mourner, I uttered a blasphemy against man, which is permissible in extreme cases. It was my own, not William's.

"Peter," I said, "do you know what I think the devil really is?"

"What?" he asked.

"Only a temporary weakness in man, or mankind. Nothing permanent. A streak of ordinary human heinousness from which we suffer now and then like any other sickness."

Peter sat up and regarded me as if he saw his old orthodox mother coming down the road with a grass-green heresy on her head. There was a whoop of astonishment in his eye.

"I have always thought Satan was a figure of speech in the Bible," I began again, "a sort of parable meant to convey the truth, like that tale of the whale that swallowed Jonah. I am not saying that a fish could not swallow a missionary, you understand; but I do say that Jonah was in no condition to preach that same day. He would have been obliged to lie round and get his breath and clean up a bit."

I did not look at Peter, but I could hear his chair creaking as if he were stirring about and bracing his back for a jolt.

"If Satan had been a separate and distinct entity he would not have been at all. The Lord would have seen to that in the beginning. But when he created man and endowed him with considerable powers and gave him dominion over all things, it turned out that the devil was the intimate personal creation of Adam himself. No way to get rid of him without destroying man. We do it ourselves, by faith in God," I concluded, feeling that I had held my note too long.

"If you will notice the works of the devil they are always performed by men. If you notice the works of God you know that no man or devil could have done them. They are too altogether and perfectly good and everlasting. They work, Peter! The machinery never gets out of order; his systems and seasons go on. The grass always springs. The rain

always falls with justice. The sun shines, and we always get a night at the end of each day in which to trust him more fully than we can in the light, and so that we can rest, blessed and folded away in his starlit care!"

"Mother! That is just poetry!" Peter answered.

"It is the truth," I retorted; "but does anything wrong we do, last? It does not. It will not work, Peter. Every force in us is against it, as life is opposed to death. To live we must destroy that which is evil that we do; that is what the gospel is for, to teach us how!"

"We are a long time learning," he said after a pause.

"We have so much to learn," I retorted, looking across and fixing my eyes upon him, over the tops of my glasses. "For example, you should know better than to bring a man into your house who rejoices in his own demoniacal possession."

"That was a mistake, having the fellow here," he admitted; "but I hoped to—well, convince him that he was wrong. I wanted to help settle this strike, keep the church's influence to the front in this time of stress," he explained.

"You cannot exorcise the devil in a man who has chosen evil to be his god," I told him.

"You heard what he said to me?" he asked.

"I saw him. That was enough. He is a criminal," I answered, not willing to admit that the

parlor door had been ajar when he knew that I always kept it closed.

I usually look at the paper before Peter comes down in the morning so as to be able to discuss the news while he is reading it later at the breakfast table. This may interrupt him but it keeps me from sitting too dumb and effaced at my end of the table. The next morning after Kleffler's visit I laid it with the other mail beside his plate, and when he came in to breakfast I did not annoy him as I sometimes do by telling him the news before he can see it for himself. I merely said, "Good morning, Peter," in that tone of virtue women use when they have a headache or a grief.

Peter spread his paper over his plate when he opened it, as he usually does while he waits for his toast and coffee. Then he snatched it up and made a sort of Adam curtain of it before his face. I could see only the top of his head growing pink where his hair is thin. The headline on the front page that held his eye announced an arrest by Federal agents the night before. The interview with one of these agents which followed gave a fairly complete account of Kleffler's operations. He was known only as a labor agitator until recently, when he had been identified as the man wanted for complicity in a number of bomb outrages.

The last paragraph stated in a small cool voice

that Kleffler had been arrested as he was leaving the residence of a "prominent minister, where he had dined."

I knew when Peter finished reading that last damning sentence, for he looked over the top of it at me.

The most regretfully prideful moments in a woman's life are those when she knows she has better judgment and more sense than the reigning man in her family. I experienced the pangs of this dolorous superiority now.

"It is mete and proper to associate with sinners and even Republicans, Peter—many of them are worthy people—but it does not say anywhere in the Bible that a preacher ought to break bread with a radical," I said in my headaching voice.

He made no reply. He slurred his breakfast and immediately retired to his study, where he remained all day, which was Saturday. There was only one thing he could do, and he did it. The next morning he preached a powerful sermon against communists, anarchists and socialists. He was very severe. He cleared his skirts in this discourse of any stain that might have been left on them by his recent guest. On Monday morning excerpts from this sermon appeared prominently in the same papers that carried the news of Kleffler's arrest as "he was leaving the residence of a prominent minister."

The strikers went back to work on this same day.

I thought the arrest of Kleffler had much to do with the end of the strike, but many people in Peter's church insisted that the startling exposures he had made of what radicalism really meant in his Sunday morning sermon had its weight with the strikers.

My son is a very smart man. He can turn a sharp corner with astonishing speed and arrive in the straight and narrow way where everybody can see him before anyone can form an adverse judgment about what he was doing round that corner. I will not go so far as to say this kind of moral agility in a preacher is wrong, but I do think Peter would not have been obliged so frequently to finance his harmlessness of a dove with so much serpent wisdom if he had had at this time a clearer vision of his offices as a minister of the gospel.

During the early spring of this year 1919, the earth that the Lord has made was in its usual health. All the seed sown came up for harvest. Not a single thing was changed in this silent order of Nature, established in the beginning. But there were unimaginable disturbances in the other order, that we make and unmake for ourselves. The world, for which so many young men had just fought and died, seemed to be slipping. It rocked and swayed like a little foolish thing in the wind of many minds. In vain did the echo of our own mighty idealism re-

verberate across the seas. We paid no attention—that is, not any high and noble attention. We were still examining our "long loose leg," counting the jerks it had suffered, and wondering why we had offered it so carelessly. We would not join the League of Nations to enforce peace, though we were pledged to it and ought to do it, because after the experience we had over there it looked too much like another way of offering this member to be pulled indefinitely. We felt twitchings and pains as strong as bitter memories in our financial muscles. We turned round as a nation and regarded that great idealist and evangelist, Mr. Woodrow Wilson, whom we had come near to worshiping for the duration of the war, with considerable curiosity, which was not worshipful, nor altogether friendly. He was still in Paris at this time, but our leg was paining us even before he went over there. And now it was giving us fits.

Sometimes I have my doubts about risking a man in his spirit to determine the policies of a great nation. He may not be entirely in his senses. It depends upon how you interpret and apply the truth to practical affairs whether it turns out to be not the truth at all but a dangerous doctrine. This is why your Simon-pure idealist is dangerous if you take him out of his attic and away from his books. He has a streak of red in him that shows up when he gets hold of your Government, your Army and your

treasury. He means well, but what he means does not turn out well. He skips the unalterable fact of human nature—namely, that you cannot take what belongs to one man or one nation and give it, however gloriously, free, gratis and for nothing, to another man or another nation without rousing the very honest devil of possession that is in us all. Enough of a thing is enough, and that is what no idealist ever finds out.

But this stir in Washington was not the worst of it. The cost of everything went up as it did not go up during the war. We had one sort of famine after another. If it was not gas it was sugar, and for the first time in my life I paid twelve dollars for a pair of shoes, not nearly so good as I used to get for three dollars. We paid fifty cents a pound for steak.

I never realized how futile human statutes were until men gathered in councils, legislatures, Congress—everywhere, to pass laws to correct this abuse or that abuse. Nothing was mended.

The general opinion was that these disordered conditions were due to the war. No doubt they were; but what I want to know is, why a merchant who showed up as a working patriot with his arm round every farmer's neck persuading him to buy bonds with his cotton money when he had never had any money before, sold this same farmer a suit of clothes for fifty dollars that cost him only ten dollars? Patriotism is far more emotional than religion and

not nearly so lasting in its effects on character. I could look over Peter's congregation every Sunday and see many back-slidden patriots in it, men who gave their time and their eloquence to war work; now they seemed strangely shrunken and ignoble. There were no worse profiteers among us. It was the same everywhere.

In the summer of this year, with everything going wrong and the few anxious pop-eyed dollars thrifty people had saved to get them through the bad weather of life being spent for the bare necessities, the high cost of the heathen struck us. We had spent billions of dollars for war bonds, we had given millions more to finance every kind of war service. Now the Christian churches took a hand. Each denomination in quick succession put over a drive for funds.

We had to fight the war and we had to have the money to pay the costs, and for the waste and sentimentalities of war. But what will happen to us if too many other interests adopt Mr. McAdoo's methods? The plan for raising the centenary fund in our church was patterned after them. In a few weeks our Methodist churches raised seventy-five million dollars without leaving even a souvenir bond behind to show for what we had given. And we put it all over Mr. McAdoo when it came to the cost of the campaign, which was only one and a half per cent of the amount raised!

Peter's church during this period looked like a motion-picture palace. There were billboards on the street outside covered with highly colored posters. The subjects of these pictures varied from several different scenes from the life of Jesus, including the crucifixion, to others of heathen and savages to be saved—presumably by this fund. But there was not a single one portraying a profiteering capitalist or a labor agitator or a common backslider, which in my opinion was about half doing this poster business. My feeling is that a Christian church ought not to have backbitten the heathen by exposing them to such a disadvantage in these pictures if we did not have the courage to show up our own sinners in the same high colors.

I try to be a reasonbly good woman. When I cannot live in charity with my neighbor I resort to living in silence with him. But there is a sort of spite in the best of us that never dies. It only dies down until something happens to stir it up again. Sitting in Peter's church on Sunday with these posters inside and outside of it, I recalled the embarrassment the guests used to show at tea parties when I first came to this city, and so far forgot proprieties as to mention the Lord and his mercies. I decided in the light of these posters that whatever the reason for this embarrassment it was neither reverence nor spiritual modesty.

I will not go so far as to say that this financial

activity in the name of the Lord was wrong. By this time I was so befuddled that I could not tell my moral right hand from my spiritual left hand. But it does something to people, even Christian people, to handle, have and hold large sums of money. One of the oft-repeated promises made during this drive for our centenary fund was that no preacher should receive a salary of less than one thousand dollars a year. This was a popular appeal in a section where many of them even in these hard times were living on six hundred and their sublime faith in God. We understood that these men's salaries would be supplemented from the centenary fund. What happened was that certain churches, already heavily burdened with the obligation they had taken to pay so much each year for five years to this fund, were notified that they must raise their pastors' salaries to at least a thousand dollars! They did, out of the pockets of their members, not the centenary fund.

Peter's church was among the many that oversubscribed the assessment levied on it for this fund. Preachers are the best agents in the world for collecting money. I have no doubt that if this Government had turned over the whole business to them of getting finances for the war—with Mr. McAdoo, of course, to advise them—they would have done it without the artifice of selling bonds, and so the country would have been saved the enormous taxes

we must pay for a lifetime, because in that case there would have been no excuse for imposing these taxes.

There was now very little Ph. D. stuff left in Peter, and no poetic mysticism at all. He had passed, still like the shooting star of himself, out of the women's clubs, and the seat of his popularity had been transferred to the firmer sex, which, you will observe, is never the case with a man whose personality makes him the hero orator of strictly feminine organizations.

Peter made a rise. He was made a member of the Add and Carry Club. The membership was composed of prominent business and professional men, and it was nearly as large as that of Peter's church. This club could do anything from promoting the best interests of the city to entertaining the manager of a vaudeville circuit with a complement of his lady stars.

I was opposed to his joining it, but he reminded me that other leading ministers belonged to it. He still insisted that to serve you must get down among men, when the gospel plan is that preachers ought to stay up among men. I thought my son could be the patient long-suffering brother of his fellow man without becoming his buddy. Maybe this was spiritual pride, but when his own stewards who were in the thing began to call him "Pete," when they motored by to get him for a game of golf, I felt

queer. I wondered if they still thought of him as "Pete" on Sunday, when he preached and prayed and pronounced the benediction. Familiarity does beget contempt, and contempt is very bad for a preacher.

One evening the phone rang. I answered it. A woman's voice inquired if this was the residence of the Rev. Mr. Peter Thompson. I said it was. Was he at home? I said yes. She wanted to speak to him, please. I called Peter. Like most public men he was always suspicious of the phone. He asked me to find out who this was. I went back and asked that question. She said: "Never mind; I am sure Mr. Thompson will be glad to speak to me."

I told Peter what she said, and he came grumbling to the phone. I stood back, you may say maternally anxious, waiting to hear who this was, having a vague recollection of this mewing voice, but not able to place it.

Peter took the receiver and said: "Well, this is Mr. Thompson."

Then I saw him rake his hand through his hair, clamp the receiver tightly to his ear as if he feared it might leak a word, and look over his shoulder at me.

"That's all right, mother," he said.

I took the hint and went back to the parlor, but I left my mind out there in the hall eavesdropping Peter. This can be done. You have only to know

a little in order to infer the rest of what may be going on behind your presence. I reflected that if this was Mrs. Smith, wanting to consult Peter about something, he would have said, "How do you do, Mrs. Smith?" and so on. And at the same time he would have frowned confidentially to me because this woman was one of those church pests who insisted upon consulting her pastor at every turn of her Christian conscience. And if this was one of his deaconesses asking instructions he would have given them in his business tone of voice. But his manner and voice were not those of a pastor talking to one of the Dorcases of his flock. This was the man of him obviously speaking to the woman of somebody else at the other end of the phone.

Presently he came to the door with his hat in his hand and said he was going out for a while and that I need not wait up for him.

I noticed this unusual consideration because it was not my custom to stay up when Peter was out in the evenings. I had not done such a thing on purpose since he was a boy. But when a sensible good man in his thirties suddenly shows signs of furtive adolescence it is time to take notice and act accordingly. I was determined to keep my light burning until Peter returned that night. I did not doubt my son, but I doubted that woman whose voice I had heard over the phone. I make no excuses for my anxiety. Every good woman knows that she must

develop enough evil-minded ability to suspect some of the worst in her own sex if she protects the men in her family. Even then she may be obliged to do violence to her candid Christian virtues and resort to spite if she does her duty.

CHAPTER V

When Peter went out in the evening to meet some engagement he always came in for a little bedtime talk if I had not retired to my room. Or he would sit in that comfortable silence your elder children have after they have outgrown the wing feathers of your nearer love and care. So on the night when he had gone to pay that mysterious call I made a sort of maternal illumination of my waiting wakefulness by turning on all the lights in the parlor. But when he came in at eleven o'clock he paused at the open door only long enough to say, "Still up, mother?" and went directly to his room.

It is only when a wife or a maid desires to be deceived by a lover that any man can deceive a woman at all. They are singularly apparent to the searching feminine eye. If one of them knows he is doing what his legal womankind believes is right and proper he is the most candid of all creatures, but lacking that approval he becomes the most evasive and secret. It is the one universal form of masculine cowardice, which goes under the profession every man makes to himself of not wishing to disturb you about what is not your business but his

own private personal business. This is why anxious elderly mothers are frequently obliged for conscience' sake to watch and meddle with the inalienable rights of their bachelor sons. And as I have said many times before, you cannot be too particular if your son is also a preacher.

Peter had passed the youthful period of celibacy when a young man instinctively guards his liberty and rarely marries without being overhauled by the strength of his emotions, and he had reached the stage when a bachelor sometimes faces about and makes up his mind deliberately to take a wife. I thought something like that was going on. And I feared even more that some lady-doll saint in Peter's church might be arranging for an innocent flirtation with her pastor. I hoped the Lord would lead me in the matter, and I made up my mind to be led on the slightest provocation.

It is the little things out of which jokes on the funny page of a Sunday newspaper are made that are frequently the most serious things in the actual experience of living. A cartoonist might have found excellent material for such caricaturing in our home during the next few days. Peter was not himself; he was his other self, reserved, but secretly animated. I was not myself, either. I felt like an old gray-haired key that could not turn in the lock of the younger, dearer life of my son. Peter said I was not looking well and suggested that I should go

to a quiet place in the country for a good long rest. I told him that I preferred to stay right there and look after him.

"It will be time enough, Peter," I added, "for me to get that rest when you marry some good Christian woman who can take care of you."

This description of his future wife seemed to widen the breach between us. His relations to me took on the elegance of filial diplomacy.

I always answer the phone to save him from that class of people who use it as a highwayman does his gun, to hold up a busy man or a tired one and rob him of his time or his rest. But now when the phone rang I could never get to it before he was already there. If he was in the midst of preparation for his Sabbath service he could hear it if the thing barely clicked, and he would be out of his study like a shot. Some time during the evening he invariably received the call he expected, if he was not out calling in person.

One day Mrs. Buckhart came in from Drumhead. She talked for an hour, but I knew that she had not said the thing she came to tell. She had the morally inflated look a maliciously good woman has when her mind is full of something which is not good.

"Did you see the announcement in the paper this morning about Isobel Sangster?" she asked casually as she was going.

I had not seen it, I told her; but suddenly I real-

ized that this was something I had been expecting for a week.

"She had an interview about her work in France. I can't think how she dared to do it," she went on.

"Why?" I asked.

"Well, she was in France only a short time, when she first went over. She has been in London for a year. She was married there."

"Married! Did you say she is married?" I exclaimed.

"No; I said she was married, to Captain Gleate, a British army officer. That is what I mean. She is back here representing herself still as Isobel Sangster."

"Where is her husband?" I asked, trying not to show what was going on in my mind.

"He has left her. That is why she came home. She cannot find anything of her husband but his lawyer. And this lawyer has cut off her allowance, according to instructions he received from the invisible Captain Gleate, on account of Isobel's doubtful conduct."

She took out her handkerchief and patted her powdered face, which was perspiring.

"Mrs. Sangster told me," she went on, "in strictest confidence. She is very much upset, poor thing, and had to tell somebody. I did not intend to mention it, but I was in to see the Sangsters last night.

Isobel is not conducting herself as a married woman should."

There was a little silence such as women use when they mean more than it is prudent to say. The one thought I held was that Peter had been out the evening before, and it was not prayer-meeting night.

Mrs. Buckhart had risen to take her leave before I could gather my wits.

"Do you know what is going to happen?" she demanded.

I implied that I did not, without saying so.

"Well, for the next ten years these marriages for the duration of the war are going to split the morals of this country. These pro tem brides will be popping up, and these modern Enoch Arden husbands will be drifting in from the ends of the earth to press their haggard faces against the windows of innocent people's domesticity."

She went down the steps to the street, waving her hand at my parlor window, which was very suggestive.

That night when the phone rang I was sitting before it with the receiver to my ear when Peter came down the hall from his study.

"That must be for me, mother; I will answer," he said.

"No; this call is for me, my son, and I am answering. It will take only a minute," I said in an aside to him.

"Yes," I went on over the phone, "this is Main two-six-seven. Yes, he is here." I heard Peter make a quick step forward. "This is Mrs. Thompson speaking. Can I take the message? . . . No, not unless you give your name. . . . Yes, I remember you when you were Miss Sangster. I only heard of your marriage this morning, Mrs. Gleate. I am sure my son does not know of it at all. I will tell him who is calling. Hold the line please. . . . No? Very well then. Good night."

I hung up the receiver and looked at Peter.

"I had to do it, my son. You will forgive me presently," I said.

Then I told him what I had heard.

"And you see she does not deny it!" I added.

He was pale, no doubt with anger. A man can be as mad with the woman who saves him from making a fool of himself as he is with the other one, who is ready to betray him. I had the guilty feeling of having done my duty as I watched Peter, who had not said a word, walk back up the hall to his study and close the door.

This affair was never mentioned between us again. But I often wondered who was responsible for the announcement of the Sangster girl's marriage, which appeared in the afternoon paper the next day, but not among the social news items. It was as scathingly brief as a warning, and headed

that column in the advertising page which contains "Notices to the Public."

I do not say that the women sent to France during the war for a great service, which most of them rendered with admirable courage and fortitude, should not have married over there. The amazing thing is that so small a number of them did marry when you consider how easy it must have been under the circumstances to choose a husband. But I do think the last one of them who came home should have been required to stand a civil-service examination as to her matrimonial qualifications before being allowed to enter the country. And if the military authorities had brought back a roster of the men who married abroad this would have prevented much confusion. In that case many young soldiers who take a brief course in French matrimony would not have married so glibly when they came home.

The hard times William and I had in the itinerancy were real. They were intelligible and personal to us. We could lay our fingers on it and say, "This is poverty." Or William was sent to a poor appointment when he deserved a better one. The worst thing that ever happened to us was when he held a revival and preached and prayed in vain because backsliders would not be reclaimed and sinners would not confess and believe. He passed through a period of depression at such times, but he invariably

came out of it strengthened in his faith. If things looked bad for us he would remind me of that Scripture which says, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." He derived great comfort from this idea of carrying his native country round with him, removed and safe from the trials and vicissitudes of our mortal existence.

Sitting here in this fine city parsonage with nothing much in reach of me to do in the Lord's name, but with all the world about me unsettled and disturbed by bitterness, violence and strange doctrines, I can see us as we were then and as the world was then, comparatively safe and peaceful, two tired travelers on the road somewhere between William's churches dingy and dusty and very little script in our pockets, but having still the kingdom of heaven within us.

The tears will come when I think of them now, those plain sweet days. I remember little stretches of the road where the shadows lay cool as blessings in the hot summer days. I can recall the sheep pastured behind Redwine Church, and the lambs that strayed at will among the tumbled gravestones of the churchyard. I can see the faces of so many men and women whom we knew then, and the way we thought of them, either as the obedient children of God or the disobedient ones, but always every one of them, his children. And all the time I am really looking down upon this city street, filled with the

stir and bustle of traffic and with the hurrying feet of men who seem so far removed from being obedient or even disobedient to God.

I have said my prayers and tried to do my duty, but I shall never be again as good a woman as I was then, keeping up with William when he ascended his mountains, comforting him when he passed through some valley of defeat, always sure of that kingdom of heaven within him, not worrying because I had no such deep personal sense of it myself.

Toward the end of his ministry, when his memory failed along with his strength, he used to forget himself and preach twice in succession from this text to the same congregation. Even if he promised me to preach some other sermon and actually did start off the next Sunday with a different text he would invariably return to his kingdom of heaven geography and devote the remainder of his discourse to telling of the blessings of this fair country. It was not until his memory failed and he could not find his thoughts on this subject that his faith failed and he took up with Job in the Scriptures.

During all these years there were no world problems in our lives, only those connected with life in the world to come. I formed the habit of sharing William's anxiety about the saving of souls. If the morals of a community were not good he preached repentance and faith. The futility of changing

men's lives by any other means never occurred to him. The mind we had was far beyond fortune or misfortune. Sometimes we had a panic of a presidential election, but we were so safely and scripturally poor that financial oscillations of securities and bonds in the markets did not affect us or the people whom we served. My national sense of things was very vague, and the only intentional sense I had was strictly missionary and had to do with the heathen for whom we prayed and took up collections without ceasing. If you think in the lateral terms of this present world, such an existence was narrow; but if you are accustomed to think in the terms of faith, it was high. There was all the length and breadth of the spaces between the stars in our thoughts.

I seemed now to have passed entirely out of that existence. I heard so much bad news and saw so much that was not good that I could not keep my thoughts fixed on things above. Sometimes I used to go about attending to my household duties and saying over to myself, "For the kingdom of heaven is within you!" But it was not there. I had lost that sublime effulgence of faith. I began to tremble in my earthly shoes. For the first time in my life I was mightily concerned for just the carnal safety of mankind. No matter how earnestly you may desire to fix your thoughts upon higher things it distracts your attention and makes you nervous to see all the

familiar landmarks of your merely human existence flying round like feathers in a tempest.

I continued to read my Bible and the Christian Advocate, both of which seemed to give foreign news of a world that had passed out of sight; but I also read the secular papers, those daily serials of our civilization. And they read like so many chapters of a doubtful dime novel. Nothing good seemed to be going on in the world. We had spent more money for war expenses than there was in the world. One kind of ruin or another stared us in the face every morning in the headlines of these papers. The cost of living continued to rise. And labor was still running round like a chicken with its head off, increasing capital by every kind of thriftless extravagance, and fighting capital at the same time with a sort of senseless malignancy. That inner law which binds men to God and a good conscience was laid aside, and the whole nation waited for Congress to pass other laws, which would protect us against ourselves and our neighbors and especially the profiteers. But the two great political parties at Washington seemed to have forgotten the nation. They engaged in a free-for-all fight, apparently on the peace treaty, but really it was a political wrestling match in the interest of their own affairs.

I have sometimes wondered that the worst shrinkage in the securities of this nation has not occurred in the character, honor or judgment of her statesmen.

William always said that a man who cared more about the doctrines that distinguished his denomination from another than he did about the salvation of souls was a sort of mean Christian, if he was a Christian at all. And it does seem to me that our leading statesmen care more for the fortunes of the political parties they represent than they do for the safety of this country.

I suffered spiritually for the first time in my life from the miasma of political news. I was very uneasy about my country; no less because now at last it seemed highly probable that women would obtain the ballot. I am not a parading suffragist, but I have always been one for conscience' sake. There is no possible doubt that women can clean up this country and make it safer for men as well as women and children to live in. But the question is whether they will do it, or add confusion worse confounded to that which we already have. They are born politicians. They practiced politics long before men practiced anything but brute force to obtain their rights. They have been obliged always to resort to persuasion and policies to get what they wanted even in the small one-woman relation to one man. Now that they have won the opportunity to exercise these well-developed gifts in national affairs nobody knows what will happen. My own suspicion is that the great majority of them will not exercise it at all, but they will still devote themselves to

getting elected to and by the one man, for the same old office of love and sacrifice which they have always held. But the thing that troubles me is this: So far, men, rightly or wrongly, have borne the chief reputation for guilt in the world. They have done the cheating and swindling in the public eye while the pretty pilferings of vain women, who are mere ornaments, have been concealed good-naturedly by their mankind. The men have shared their sex's reputation for not being moral with a grin of secret satisfaction even when they were quite moral. They have conducted the business and elections of this nation with successful unscrupulousness or any other way they pleased. And it has been very difficult to embarrass them about their deeds done in the body. They take a marauding satisfaction in these bodies.

But now the woman citizen will be subject to all the rigors of adverse publicity. What women really are in secret will be known in the open for the first time since their gender and gentleness made them sacred to just men. They will not be sacred. Maybe they are not entirely so, anyway, but it is sometimes more dangerous to destroy an illusion than a civilization. What would happen to us if we suddenly discovered that men really are not brave? It would be a terrific loss. What will happen if women are dismantled and picked to pieces in the shambles of political life? Even if they do not de-

serve it this will happen. Besides, somebody must be meek and long-suffering. With all their follies and vanities and limitations it has been the women who have always practiced this negative but essential virtue.

I may be mistaken, but it seemed to me that the very rumor of suffrage has upset the dependable patience of my sex. A few years ago the women belonging to the missionary societies in our church owned and administered some millions of dollars' worth of property and funds. At a certain General Conference they allowed the bishops to take it away from them without a murmur. Quite recently these same women have stewed and stirred things until they have obtained, in spite of these bishops, a kind of suffrage in church affairs under the name of "laity rights." I mention this instance not to condemn it but to indicate that the bonds which formerly held women no longer bind them anywhere.

It is not the growth of the divorce evil in this country that is so significant now as the kind of women who are demanding divorces. As a rule your divorcee has been married only a few years or she is of the sporting class who marries for alimony only; but it is not unusual now to read the account of some old gray-haired wife who sails into the courts and demands a divorce from the husband with whom she has lived for thirty or forty years. And she will ask for it on the same grounds she has endured with

meekness all those years. I do not say she ought not have it. What I claim is that something awful is going on when women of that age can rise up and swear themselves out of wedlock.

The activities of the church were never so well advertised as they are to-day; but the spiritual experiences of Christian men are not. If there could be or ever is now such a thing as an old-fashioned love feast where somebody besides dingy, forlorn preachers at an Annual Conference praise the Lord for his blessings, there would be no sign of it the next morning on the streets or in the world's places of business. If a very rich and prominent man should rise up in an experience meeting and tell what the Lord had done for him, and maybe let go enough to move about shaking hands with the brethren, I reckon this ought to be regarded as sensational news, because it so rarely happens. Your rich man may be generous, but you almost never see him prance in the spirit. I doubt if a man can with his pockets full of money. Still, if it did happen the papers that mention everything else he does would suppress this. I do not know why, unless the witness of public opinion, which is far more drastic than the witness of the Spirit, might test his professions to the point of bankruptcy according to that Scripture which says: "Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor." I reckon that verse in the Bible has kept many an old rich man from going too far under the stress

of spiritual emotions. But what happens in the world reports itself like a ticker in the church. The trend of the times comes in with the congregation and sits bolt upright during prayers, looking round when it should be on its knees.

Peter had barely collected the hundred thousand dollars for the centenary fund which had been assessed on his church when Mr. Cathcart, who contributed most liberally to it, became involved in a scandal. This was a well-staged blackmail performance shockingly personal to Mr. Cathcart, not to go into the details. He was innocent. The papers insisted that he was, but they published every scrap of this news about Cathcart. Everybody said he was innocent, but very few believed that he was entirely so. I suppose this was because it is very difficult for a man to be entirely innocent of anything.

Straight on, now, what happened in the world began to happen in that church. Peter and the press and the prominent members had scarcely got Cathcart out of his difficulties more dead than alive and his pastel-colored clothes changed to the pepper-and-salt tones more becoming to a man of his age when Mrs. Hunk became insanely jealous of Mr. Hunk, and we all heard about it. This was one of those cases of matrimonial blackmail which occurs frequently without attracting so much public attention. Many a husband lives and dies in an atmosphere of distrust created by his wife, whom no one else sus-

pects of this meanness. And there are so many women whose married lives are long penal sentences served beneath the groundless suspicions of their husbands.

Mr. Hunk and his wife are members of Peter's church. He is meekly prominent there, she is excessively so. He is one of those dull men who succeed in business by sticking to it, admirable, decent and distressingly homely. His large nose sits a trifle sidewise on his face, as if it perpetually dodged the thought you aimed at it. He has a double chin but not much of a real chin. His large blue eyes are bloodshot, always suffused with a sort of physical tearfulness.

Mrs. Hunk is a dark, elderly woman with a wrinkled skin and a snap in her black eyes. She suggests still the spiteful prettiness of her youth. But now she dresses like a virtue, which is never a becoming way for any woman to dress, but always accusative. She wears her skirts longer and wider than the fashion is, her waist tighter and buttoned up. She walks with a swish, and pops her heels on the floor as if authority was vested in these heels. It was not that she always preceded Mr. Hunk down the aisle of the church on Sunday morning, it was the subdued way he followed her that was significant.

One hot afternoon when everything was going from bad to worse in this turgid city, Mr. Hunk called on Peter. They went into the study together.

From where I sat in the parlor I saw Mr. Hunk go back and close the door of the study, which meant, of course, that he had something very private to say.

They were in there a long time. I could hear the rumble of Hunk's voice, but nothing at all in reply from Peter. Silences fell, then the same voice would begin again in broken sentences like that of a man overtaken in prayer by the stress of his emotions.

I endeavored to fix my attention on the trimming I was crocheting for a pair of pillow cases, but it is very difficult to do that at my age when something is going on in the next room and you do not know what is going on.

Finally they came out in the hall. I heard Mr. Hunk blow his nose, though it was summer weather, when people rarely have occasion to blow their noses. He said something in the raucous voice of a man whose very words ache with grief, and Peter answered soothingly, as he took leave of him, that he did not think it was serious and that it would soon pass away. This sounded like a boil, but I knew it could not be a boil.

Then Peter came in and sat down. He had the mystified look a young doctor must sometimes wear when he is called to attend a patient whose complaint is one in which he did not graduate as a medical student.

"Mother," he said presently, "I wish you would call on Mrs. Hunk."

I regarded him inquiringly.

"It is a case I cannot handle," he went on.

"What is the matter with Mrs. Hunk?" I asked.

"She is insanely jealous of her husband," he answered with a slow grin, probably at the expense of Hunk's ludicrous unattractiveness.

"He was in here a while ago to see me about this. Mrs. Hunk has become a crisis. He is all broken up, humiliated. Never given her the slightest cause. They have been married nearly thirty years, and this is a new development, though he admits that she has always been inclined to—well, keep an eye on him," he concluded dryly.

I told Peter that I was willing to do my Christian duty, but that the Spirit had never led me to the folly of trying to restore the confidence of another woman in her own husband. I said that jealousy was a disease, a form of hysteria, and in Mrs. Hunk's case I thought it was probably a virulent form of malicious hysteria.

"But something must be done. He says he can't stand the inferno of her suspicions," Peter insisted.

"Well, that is the remedy," I answered. "If he is innocent she knows it. So soon as she discovers that he will not endure her persecution she will stop it. Tell him to show his teeth at Mrs. Hunk!" I advised.

Peter laughed.

"All women are instinctively afraid of men," I explained. "If Mr. Hunk went home this evening,

roared in his strictly masculine voice, found fault with the dinner, kicked a chair across the room, and growled a look at his wife, she would be a changed woman. She would forget her jealously in this real emergency of soothing a savage beast."

Peter laughed again. He said he had no idea I could think up such a fiercely unchristian doctrine. I told him there was much in human relations that did not come under the head of Christian doctrines.

"The trouble is poor old Hunk is not a savage beast," he said.

"And he is a good man," I added, "else he would have found out long ago how to manage Mrs. Hunk. That is frequently the reason why bad men keep their domestic relations in order. They create a diversion by being so disagreeable at home that they achieve meekness instead of suspicion in their wives."

Peter said that as Mr. Hunk's pastor he doubted the wisdom of giving this kind of advice.

I went on crocheting and thinking after he had gone back to his study. This affair of the Hunks, I decided, was another case of the general insolvency of faith that had existed and that no longer existed between these two people. Not to believe had become the habit of men and women.

On the previous evening Peter had four young men in to dine with us. They were members of his church and prominent in business and professional circles. After dinner the conversation did what it

frequently does in my house. It drifted out in a discussion of conditions in the world at large, and left me sitting in my silence, merely listening.

I was greatly entertained for a time, as an elder person is with the more or less declamatory opinions of young people. Then I had a queer experience. Seth Wilkes, who is a banker, was talking when I suddenly discovered that no one in the parlor except Peter believed a single word Wilkes was saying. I was indignant. I felt sorry for this earnest young man. Presently Mr. Hickson, who is a lawyer, had the floor, and I was astonished to realize that no one believed what he said, or even in his sincerity, except my son Peter, who sat with his legs crossed, his excellent countenance lifted and lighted with the animation of perfect faith in everybody's sincerity. This is why I say Peter is a good man. He can so cheerfully and easily believe in anybody and everybody. He was far from suspecting the fact that on this evening it was his own radiant confidence which inspired his guests to talk so freely; but I laid down my work and witnessed a strange thing, as if I had been behind the scenes of these men's inner minds, and I knew before the evening was over that not one of them had any confidence in the sincerity of the others. They were trained to doubt. They could not have believed just the simple word of a man unless it was indorsed, with enough collateral put up to make it and keep it good.

Now you may restore confidence in the markets of the world that way, with just capital, but you cannot restore the confidence of man in man with anything but the renewal of faith in the honor and integrity of men. Religion is not the only faith by which we live. All human relations must be based upon belief. This is the ruin that we face, more disastrous than war or famine. It is a pestilence that attacks the very soul of mankind. Wisdom is becoming cynicism. And all the news of the world is bad. Nobody ever marries and lives happily ever after in the morning paper, but they are divorced. I wondered what would happen if we read a press dispatch some morning that a lady had just died after living forty years with a cantankerous and unworthy husband, that she had performed her love and duties faithfully and patiently, brought up a large family of excellent sons and daughters, who were doing well and honorably in the world. Well, it would not be regarded as news. The universal suspicion would be that a little old Christian obituary had crept across the wires by mistake. But if a woman has murdered her husband and flung her innocent babes in a manhole of a sewer it would be news, telegraphed to every paper in the country.

I mentioned this to Peter that evening at dinner. I wanted to know why there was so much bad news and no news of goodness. He said a queer thing.

"Goodness, mother, is sacred, and it is not talked about much. Our virtues are private; but the evil that we do concerns the safety of society and is handled by the public."

Peter sometimes mentions the subconscious mind in his sermons when he is digging his congregation. I thought when he offered this explanation he had stated one of the subconscious truths of human experience. And I had not more than thought it before he offered the conscious truth and the real reason for the popular currency of sensational news, which it seems our virtues never produce.

"Besides," he went on, "the people demand it. And they will have it."

I retorted that giving the people what they wanted was not giving them what they ought to have. I was tempted to add that this was the trouble with the ministry, as well as with the gossips and the newspapers. Preachers were softening the gospel so that it would not waken a man dead in his trespasses and sins. But I try never to hurt Peter's feelings or to discourage him, so I did not say it.

In return for this alms which I gave my son in secret I reckon the Lord blessed me with an idea, for I had one, like a shot, from somewhere.

I asked Peter why goodness could not be featured. "Like, well, the posters we had to advertise the centenary campaign," I concluded.

He turned the point of this question, as he fre-

quently did when I had him cornered, by offering me a compliment. He said I was one fine large feature of goodness myself and all I had to do was to go on living.

I retired early that night, but not to bed. I had a bee in my bonnet. Why shouldn't some one start a propaganda campaign advertising that which was good in men and women? I sat in my room and thought about it. Then I put on my spectacles and turned on the light above my desk, took out some paper and sharpened a pencil.

I was never able to feel the assurance of having a message for the world. The few people I have known afflicted this way labored under an absurdly egotistical illusion. Rather, I felt now like an old woman who is about to write a letter from a far country to my whole dear human family, just a letter giving them the news of goodness, and nothing else. The extent of my literary labors so far had been the book which I wrote years ago about William. This was not, strictly speaking, an act of letters, it was the way I had of putting a crown on William's head that could never be removed by the elders and bishops. This book was not published on account of its literary merit, but because it recorded the life and the merits of a singularly good man. It appeared anonymously, and the authorship was at once claimed by so many different women that if I had not been William's only wife I might have doubted

my own identity as the real author, especially since I could never write the same way afterward. But now all at once as I sat there before my desk I felt that same singing power of words, and I began to set down the thoughts that came to me. I do not claim that it was well or smartly done, but the matter was excellent—paragraph pictures of the good people I had known, with no more connection than there was between the divorce notices in the morning paper.

I wrote a sketch of John and Sarah Hightower. John Hightower was the meanest man I ever knew. He was ill-tempered in his home. He was so stingy that Mrs. Hightower was reduced to picking up the faulty apples in their orchard and selling them to get the money for her missionary dues. The only variation she ever had in the hard monotony of her life was when he was drunk and behaved worse than usual. She could have had a divorce for the asking, any time, but she never complained. She stood by him and their children. She had a curious happiness in these children. She was their secret providence. After a while, when his sons and daughters had grown up and married, old Hightower's temper seemed to wear out. He loosened up a bit. And Mrs. Hightower had a few things she had always craved. They say one day he looked at her and said: "Well, Sarah, we were happily married, after all!" And they say she told

somebody that she had always known John was a good man if he hadn't been so worried with living. The marriage that turns out well is the happy marriage, no matter how hard a time the two people in it have had bearing with each other.

I had company that night in my heart, so many men and women I had known seemed to come back with their little good deeds to be recorded. As fast as I could set down as briefly as possible how Brother Hicks, at the age of seventy, waited on his bedridden wife, cooked, cleaned and made a living for her on a little old rabbit-skin farm he had, I would recall someone else who had been the patient good man in the community where he lived, but who could never get on very well with the saints in the church because he was so busy defending and building up the sinners.

I had more than a dozen of these little tales of honor and cheerful long-suffering written before Peter came up and asked me what I was doing up so late. I told him I had been writing a few letters. You are justified in concealing the truth sometimes.

The next morning I added a few hopeful sentences, like the smart paragraphs we see on the editorial page of a newspaper, only they were not smart and they did not bite. Good little words sowed in sentences which I hoped would come up and grow in the minds of those who read them.

When you are not accustomed to writing it wakens

you in the night and you get up and put down something that you forgot to tell. I did this for a week. I was up and down so much with my memories that Peter heard me one night and wanted to know through the door between our rooms if I was ill. I told him no, that I had heard a noise and had risen to see what it was. You may be permitted to use a figure of speech sometimes, which is the symbol of the truth concealed. The noise I heard was of tired feet on a country road long, long ago, when Jasper Wood came in the dead hours of the night to get William to go to old Tim Herndon, who was dying and had made up his mind to repent if they could get a preacher in time to do it. I had forgotten to put Jasper in. He was a rich poor man who lived on the Rocky Road circuit. He had a hard task making a living because he was everybody's good Samaritan. If a man was in trouble he went to see Jasper about it and stopped him from plowing his corn until he had relieved his mind. If anybody wanted something quick he went to Jasper and borrowed it, even if he never paid it back. If someone was sick he sent for Jasper. And in spite of being dragged hither and thither by his good heart Jasper managed to prosper.

When I had written many pages of this stuff I sent it without a word of explanation to the editor of our leading daily paper.

Nothing happened for two weeks. I endured the

strange suspense of an author. My only comfort was that no one knew that I was "hair hung and breeze shaken," as the old preacher used to say, between the editorial wastebasket and the world of letters. I still appeared to be the mother I had always been to Peter, and nothing else. Maybe a trifle absent-minded at times, having thought of another good deed that I might have put in, or feeling a little depressed, as no doubt real authors do when they fear the dangerously variable weather of an editor's judgments.

I had lost hope when the third week passed and there was no sign of a breach in the editorial policy of this paper to publish the worst and nothing but the worst that was going on.

One Sunday afternoon Peter, who is not above taking his Sunday paper on the Lord's Day, was in the parlor reading it. I was in the dining room helping the maid clear the table. Then I heard Peter laugh. He has a laugh that comes out of him with a joyful whoop and ends in a strictly masculine giggle. I thought he must be looking at the funny page, because he is not above that, either.

"Mother! I have something to show you!" he called out.

"I will come presently, Peter," I answered, going on with what I was doing.

The next moment he came in, grinning broadly.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, spreading a page of the paper before me.

There was the picture of an old man and woman seated side by side, looking grim and strong in their years, as if they had made a long journey together and knew they had come the right road. Beneath was printed: "Happily Married." Two or three smaller pictures, of plain virtuous-looking men and women, appeared below, the kind you see in old family albums, and made long before photographers learned the lying art of touching up their negatives, but left the light to tell the truth about your grandmother's wrinkles and her old-fashioned breastpin and the mole on your grandfather's nose.

I stared at these illustrations and glanced up inquiringly at Peter, as you do when you fail to see the joke.

"But you have not read the headline!" he said, crinkling his eyes to a keener humor at me.

Then I saw printed at the top of the page in tall type:

GOOD NEWS

And beneath, in a smaller type:

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

Long paragraphs and short ones followed, each with some good old motto for a title.

I experienced an overwhelming sense of guilt, confounded with the gratification of a secret pride. My name was not there, but I myself had appeared in print. I forgot for the moment the pious purpose I had when these sketches were written. I was flushed, elated and very fearful lest my son should suspect me.

"Peter, these are not my reading glasses. I cannot make out what it is all about," I said faintly.

"Well, it is all about what you talk of so much—the things good men have done, the patience with which good women have endured. It sounds so much like you that I could almost suspect you have been giving an interview to one of these smart young reporters!" he said teasingly.

"You know I would never do such a thing!" I retorted.

"Well, some fellow has put over a good thing. It comes corking near to being literature. Listen to this," he said, running his eye down one of the columns, and then beginning to read aloud what I had written about Jasper Wood coming along the dusty road at night like a whole regiment on his two feet to fetch the preacher for an old sinner who was about to die in his sins, because he would not make his peace without a minister to receive and witness his confession.

"Now that sings!" Peter exclaimed. "You hear the whir of wings about that old man of God, hurry-

ing with his salvation for that old scout about to pass."

I regarded Peter's back thoughtfully as he passed through the door into the parlor, still scanning this page of the paper. It was strange that he did not recognize this preacher as his own father. How far removed he was still from those great substances in the lives of men out of which alone poetry, religion and literature are made.

Then I took an indignant turn on my own heels because he was so far from even suspecting that his old sundown mother had written this thing. They who know us best know only our limitations best. You are much more likely to surprise your family than the world if you achieve something.

Vanity must be a very quick growth! Here I was as secretly resentful at Peter because he failed to recognize me as the author of these little candle-lit tales as if he had seen the picture of his own mother and did not know her face because her name was not written beneath it.

I went back to the table, my hand trembling so that the top tittered against the rim of the butter dish when I put it on. It is a wonder to me how real authors endure the excitement of their own performances.

Later in the afternoon, when Peter had gone somewhere I went in and read the whole of this Good-News page, much as you repeat the prayer you said

last week. My memory is not very good except for Scriptures and hymns, but I reckon I could have repeated every word on that page before I was done with it. It is odd how curious we are about the simplest little image of our own minds we create, as the homeliest woman studies the reflection of her own face in a mirror. I doubt if this is due to vanity, but probably to a sort of perpetual astonishment that what you really are is so completely hidden by this countenance. So it was a sort of miracle to see the insides of my mind spread in type on this page, and to know that no one would suspect that, least of all the feeling and purpose with which I had written.

At last I took the scissors, cut this part of the paper and climbed the stairs to the attic, where William's sermons lay neatly folded in the old tin box. What sublime imagery they contained of a good man's heart, how much more bravely they have stood out than these pale shadows of mine which I laid among them. I closed the lid and remained awhile on my knees before it, not to pray but to grieve that William's son was not such a preacher, that so much of the faith that William had lay folded away out of the thoughts and minds of men, like these yellowed pages of his old sermons.

This Good-News page created much favorable comment. The wedded life of the Hightowers and Jasper Wood's cheerful goodness became the topics

of social discussion. I was obliged to exercise considerable repression at a missionary tea during the week, when a smart young matron said Mrs. Hightower was a fool, and that the modern wife would know a sight better how to take care of herself in the married relation, or get out of it!

Peter met Mr. Quick, the editor of the paper, at the Add and Carry Club. He said Mr. Quick told him that he had long considered some such feature as this for his Sunday edition, and considered himself lucky to have hit upon the right idea; the people needed a change from the catastrophic, and he thought there would be a reaction toward old-fashioned religious idealism. He invited Peter to contribute something to this page. He said the machinery of press news was not adapted to furnishing material for such a feature, and that was the only trouble he anticipated in keeping the thing going. Peter said he thought he had a thing or two that might help Quick out in this emergency. He had asked Quick where he obtained the copy for that first page.

"He grinned and told me that was a secret, but he admitted what I suspected, that nearly all the copy came from the same source," Peter said when he was telling me later of this conversation with Quick.

"But I doubt if he can depend on it," he added, "and I imagine he plans to get the preachers of the

city to help him carry the thing. There will be one difficulty."

"What is that?" I asked.

"Most of them will want to sign their names, and he prefers that all the copy should be anonymous," he explained.

"Why should they?" I wanted to know.

"Well," he answered, smiling wittily, "preachers are like other folks—they want their children to bear their names. It is customary and natural. A man's thoughts are as much the offspring of his mind as they are of his body."

The following Sunday there was a fine short essay at the top of the Good-News page on "Be ye doers of the word," which I suspected Peter wrote because it was so rational and ethical, but he did not legitimize the thing with his signature.

Meanwhile I was resolved that Mr. Quick should not lack for the soothing copy I thought the people needed. You may say that I entered the ministry secretly, with none of the brethren to lead me in prayer, and no choir to sing, beyond the tune of my own memories. I worked my recollections to the last little decimal of a tale. Finally I worked out, and had to begin on the secret prayers and deeds of my own life. Here I discovered an inexhaustible supply of secret matter. It is astonishing how much we have lived and suffered and believed and hoped when

we have been compelled to live better than we really are.

And every Sunday my little stories filled most of this page. Peter said the only fault he had to find was with the editor. He said Mr. Quick strutted and aired himself like a hypocrite about his Good-News feature. He said the man was positively insufferable he was so boastful about how easy he found it to get more copy than he could publish. Several of the most prominent ministers in town had their contributions returned, and so on and so forth.

I do not know how this adventure might have ended for me, but for a circumstance characteristic of this strictly commercial period of doing everything by advertising and collecting a fund to carry it on.

The campaigns of various religious denominations for funds, totaling many millions of dollars, were scarcely over when the rumble of the much greater Interchurch World Movement smote the ears of all churches in all nations. At last the Lord God was to be securely established in the hearts of all men, regardless of creeds, by a fund. One of the officials of this organization passed through the city and saw what an excellent medium the Good-News page of our leading Sunday paper would be for his purposes. Thereafter it was devoted exclusively to the propaganda of latest colossal spiritual enterprise for the saving of the world.

The eighteenth amendment went into effect in July of this year. Peter had looked forward to prohibition as the solution of many problems. He thought liquor fomented strife and stirred the evil passions of all classes. We all do. But now we had a shock. The first effect we had from prohibition was a flare of indignation among many worthy citizens who had no active relation with evil forces. Those who habitually drank to the point of drunkenness had little to say. But what disturbed Peter was the exaggerated sense many members had of their constitutional rights which had been violated by this law. He was obliged to stop calling on Mr. Hobbs to lead in prayer because, though he had long been known as a consistent member of the church and had the gift of prayer, he was violently opposed to prohibition. Mr. Steward, on the other hand, was a rabid prohibitionist, and would not be led by Hobbs in prayer.

Men are queer people. I do not say that they are so deviously queer as women, but their queerness is far less consistent with the reputation they have acquired for being reasonable. They are by nature and inclination lawmakers. They hang one another for committing murder. A man is punished who steals. He is sued if he does not pay his debts. He is watched in business, lest his profits interfere with another man's rights. Any one of them will get himself elected to the legislature so that he may pass

more stringent laws. He will not allow you to expectorate on the street, even if you have a bad cold and ought not to do it in your own pocket. But the moment his own Government, which he has made and which represents him, undertakes to enforce a law against one of his physical appetites he is up in arms. It makes no difference which appetite it is. If an ordinance should be passed against the drinking of buttermilk he would die by the churn.

As for intoxicating beverages, he does not care for the stuff, never touches it, he tells you, but it is the principle of the thing to which he objects. It means paternalism in Government, and paternalism means the overlording of law. A man could not call his soul his own! This was Mr. Hobbs' argument. Presently they would take his tobacco and coffee from him! He belonged to the great minority. He was entitled to representation.

I thought this was queer, considering how earnestly he favored the Government's laying a chastening hand upon profiteers. But being only a woman maybe I do not understand paternalism. I feel that it is a figurative term in politics and does not mean what it ought to mean.

In vain Peter reasoned with Hobbs, reminding him that nearly all crime, poverty and disease may be traced directly to indulgence in strong drink. That was not the point, he said. This was a free country. Somebody was tampering with the inalienable rights

of free men to choose whether they would be sober or not sober. And for one he would not submit tamely to this oppression. There were more ways of killing a dog than choking him in butter, he announced darkly.

The primary preludes of electing officers for the city government came on. Hobbs espoused the wet ticket. Steward was the raging lion of the dry forces. They met in joint debate and accused each other in public places. They published cards villifying each other. The whole congregation of Peter's church took sides. Apparently there were no more good Christian people, but the majority of those who had gone under this name were overwhelmingly for those candidates pledged to enforce prohibition. Nevertheless, every man on the wet ticket was nominated.

The next Sunday Mr. Hobbs appeared, after several weeks' absence, at the Sabbath services as usual, sitting prominently, looking satisfied and mild, like a man who is now willing to take the gospel, having carried his point in that secular matter of the election. And Mr. Steward transferred his membership to another church.

I do not know which is the best time to hold a revival. If you have it before a political campaign many of your most influential members backslide, boosting their candidate. And if you hold it afterward the mischief has already been done. And

though a man may repent of everything else he will not repent of the candidate whom he helped elect, no matter how unworthy he may be to hold office. Peter held a series of perfunctory services after this political upheaval, much as you hold a Chautauqua. Nothing happened.

If I take a bad cold, that is the least part of my trouble. What worries me much more is how I came to get it. I recall every draft that came through an open window. I remember the times I have risen in the dead hours of the night, thinly clad, and gone upstairs and downstairs to make sure that I really did lock all the doors before retiring. I consider the soles of my shoes and try to remember whether I wore my rubbers the last time I went to prayer meeting, which was on a damp evening. But I never can decide which imprudence gave me the cold.

I was in the same doubt during the latter part of this summer, about a marked change in Peter. He went doggedly on with his work, but not with the enthusiasm that had always been characteristic of him. He had lost his buoyancy, which in my opinion was never spiritual but due to the hardy conscience he had, a good conscience, but not sensitive, and never introspective. He digested his deeds, his prayers and his sermons, and lived on them as you forget the food that sustains you. But now he was not doing very well. He was moody. He practiced

silence as a garrulous man practices speech. He devoted more time to the preparation of his sermons and preached like a man with a stone hung round his neck.

And this was not the worst of it. His church was more than half empty. This had never happened before, even in the warmest weather, when many members of his regular congregation were away on their vacations, because he had a sort of floating audience from the outside which more than compensated in members. Now these cheerful sinners were not there. Some popular virtue had gone out of him and his ministry.

I perceived that at last my son was beginning to be uneasy, like a man who fears he may receive his sight soon and be obliged to change his course. I thought he was losing that artless faith in his fellowmen which had sustained him since he entered the ministry, and which is not justified. He was at last confounded by the confusion of spirits in men which drove them this way and that like the demoniacal possessions mentioned in the Scriptures. The mountains were shaking at last, and I trembled for my son, for I could not be sure whether he would yield to a purely rational defeat or turn to God for a right understanding of his ministry.

I experienced once more the old burdened feeling I used to have when William passed through a spiritual crisis. I could never be sure he would re-

ceive the blessing he desired of his Heavenly Father, nor what would happen if he did not get it. But I knew he would not go on preaching the gospel without it. Now in the same way I was anxious about what was going on in the heart of my son. I desired above all things that he should remain in the ministry, and I knew that this question was up for settlement in his mind. He was an honest man. He was beginning to realize what I had known from the first—that his ministry had not accomplished its purpose. That he should understand this was necessary if he ever became a true priest, but what courage it requires in spiritual things to overcome defeat by faith! I did a sight of blind praying that summer to the one end that the Lord would guide Peter.

CHAPTER VI

The best of men choose strange bedfellows when they go a-fishing. I never could understand it. They do not want their own kind, but their other kind when they take to the woods and streams. A dignified old judge, associated in everybody's mind with the rigors of the law, will pack up and go off with a doubtful young sportsman who has no dignity and very little appreciation of law. I reckon it is on the same principle upon which Socrates took Alcibiades with him when he wanted a complete rest from being a philosopher. And by the same token a good-natured hardened sinner will invite his pastor to go fishing with him, though he has endured the chastening rod of this pastor's severest preaching since the last time they were off fishing together. I reckon this is also on the same principles that Alcibiades preferred the companionship of an intelligent man like Socrates when he was about to be in his cups.

Anyway in August of this year Peter went off on a two weeks' camping and fishing trip with Mr. Hickson, who is not a good man but a good fellow; Mr. Trollop, who is president of the Add and Carry Club,

an office which requires no sort of Christian endeavor to fill; Judge Bitterwater, who is a good lawyer and a good fisherman, but not distinguished for any other excellence; and the Reverend Mr. Charles Stickney.

Fathers are usually ready to recognize the fact when their sons are grown men, and even anxious to make the point. But mothers know very well that there are no grown sons in this world, and so long as they live they experience faintly and futilely those anxieties they felt when these men-children were little boys, lest they should go astray or fall into bad company. I can never get over that feeling about Peter. I was not concerned about the secular members of this fishing party, but I was by his going off with Stickney as I used to be when I caught him reading one of the Henty books, which are regarded as harmless because they are innocuous.

Brother Stickney is the pastor of the next largest Methodist church in this city. He is a modern preacher as contrasted with Peter, who was by way of being a modern thinker in the pulpit. That is to say, Stickney is accomplished in the art of entertaining his congregation, something of a comedian, and not too much of a tragedian.

Earlier in the summer while he was conducting a series of services there appeared an electric sign above the door of his church. It was one of these variegated on-and-off signs. It would flash out,

"Jesus is Here!" wink back into darkness, and come again. At the close of the meeting a week later this thing was promptly and artlessly removed.

Peter and I attended these services. He had to sit in the pulpit and I sat politely in one of the front seats. This was the nearest I have ever been to attending a vaudeville performance. It looks queer to see a minister of the gospel standing bench legged before his congregation with the elbows of these legs crooked outwardly as sharply as his real elbows, playing the title rôle of some scene in the Bible. I do not say this is wrong, but it is very difficult to fix your mind on spiritual things while it is going on. My feeling is that if you are born with the instincts of a comedian, and the Lord calls you to preach in spite of this defective levity, you ought to curb it. But many ministers enliven their discourse these days with light dramatics based on some of the noblest scenes in the Bible. I am thankful that whatever Peter's faults have been, he never made pulpit parodies of the Lord's gospel to please his congregation.

But you cannot tell what men talk about when they go a-fishing. I knew that Peter was anxious and discouraged about his ministry. I knew he had come that far at least, and I did hope and pray he would not confide too much of his doubts and fears to

Brother Stickney, nor be tempted to adopt Stickney's methods.

I need not have worried. Peter might mistake efficiency for salvation, but he would never mistake buffoonery for gospel truth. He had an honest mind and a level head. He used his legs to stand on, not to gesture with.

I spent the time while Peter was away, on the old Redwine circuit with Maggie Fleming. I remember the night, more than thirty years ago, when William received Maggie into the church and the very way she looked then—a little girl in a white dress which was a trifle smaller than she was, wearing her shoes and stockings as if these were her sad and painful Sunday morals, not to be endured on other days. I can see the faint radiance of the candlelight on her fair hair, which stood out fine and straight from her small head as if this was no time for hair to lie down and be at peace. Something was happening! I can see the drops of baptismal water fall and glisten on this head, bowed so low before the altar, and Maggie, drawn down in her terrified humility to a mere spot of whiteness with her childish face hidden in her little brown hands. And William standing young and tall above her saying his tremendous church prayer over this little mite:

"Almighty God, we thank thee for founding thy church, and promising that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. . . . We especially praise thy

name for enabling this, thy servant"—meaning Maggie!—"to avouch the Lord to be her God. Help her to perform the promise and vow which she has made, to renounce the devil, the world and the flesh; to believe the record which thou hast given to thy Son, and to walk in all thy commandments and ordinances blameless to the end of her life."

The solemn and binding words of this prayer went on rumbling and thundering over Maggie's head down to the last Amen. Then she arose with the drops of water still clinging to her hair, and started on that long journey of walking blameless to the end of her life. I doubt if anybody can do it except in the sight of the Lord, who no doubt is not so critical of us as we are of one another.

Maggie was a little child then, and I was a grown woman. But now there is not much difference in our ages according to our experiences along the way we have come. Every year I go up there to rest in her house because we know the same things by heart and can talk about them as a nun tells her beads, one memory at a time, old songs that we used to sing, old saints that we used to know.

But there is one difference between us: Maggie, who has brought up a family and seen her children married, and who has been a widow for many years, and been obliged to meet her world face to face, knows so much less than I do of the evil in the world. I do not tell her. Nothing would make her believe

it. This is indeed to be blameless. Sometimes it has occurred to me that if I was as good a woman as we are commanded to be in his name, I should know less than I do about what is wrong with everybody. But maybe the Lord will know how to make allowances in his tender mercies, for a woman who has been called in her old age to be the mother of a fashionable city preacher and who was never before accustomed to the ways of the world, which, in spite of Maggie's innocent faith, are not religious ways.

I attended services at Redwine Church on Sunday. The same old church, a little more weather-beaten outside, a darker richer brown within, but no sign needed above the door to announce the presence of the Lord. The pastor was an old circuit rider, on his last legs in the itinerancy. But you could tell by the lean gospel strength of his countenance, by his fine beak of a nose and the eagle clearness of his eye that he had been a fighting preacher in his day and had wielded the doctrines of his church with that ancient effectiveness attributed to another man of faith who achieved such astonishing execution among his enemies with the jaw bone of an ass. But like most preachers of the elder militant order he was simmering down now to just the sweetness of the word. He preached on the Fatherhood of God, nothing new, and with no wisdom of words, but he took it here and there from the Scriptures, merely

feeding his lambs, so to speak, not arguing with them or urging them to believe. Their faith it appeared had been confirmed long ago.

From the window where I sat in the church I could see the stone above William's grave. It had begun to lean a little. I went back the next day and had it set up straight. I usually spend a good deal of my time in this churchyard when I am visiting Maggie. Most of the people to whom William preached the first year after we were married are buried there now, the good ones and the bad ones side by side. I doubt if it matters much when we have slipped down into the common dust, whose dust this used to be that lies nearest our own. The differences that living made between us are past, and what is left of us comes up kind and kin to the grass at last.

I felt very quiet about myself in this place. A hundred miles distant the life of the turgid city, from which I had come, still seethed. There were the crowds and crowds of people hurrying and knotting and snarling like a hank of human threads that nobody knows how to unwind. But in the shadow of this old church with only the epitaphs of so many men and women whom I had known to keep me company, and with the little seed plumes of the grass above their graves bending in the soft summer wind, this city, these people and the fever of their strange disorders seemed infinitely removed and unimportant, like little moments of time you waste when you

have been in a great hurry to do something. It will be done, that something. But you will not do it. You will have become a part of this peace and this silence long before these people find the way and catch step with the march of stars to the kingdom of God.

I could not worry enough in this quiet place even to pray for Peter, who had been constantly on my heart of late. An assurance came to me as clear as a voice which speaks, that all would be well with my son. I should live to see him know the truth and suffer for it. I should see him broken by the world and established in the Lord. Then I found myself weeping for Peter, thinking of what he must endure, grieving for that life of a man and a man's hopes which he must yield in exchange for this terrible peace.

I reckon one reason why the Lord does not frighten us too often with an answer to prayer is because it requires real courage to face one when we are put to the test. Maybe this is why he spares us and goes on attending to our needs without making us quake beforehand by letting us know what we must pay in pain and sacrifice.

I went back to the city the last week in August. Peter returned the next day on the late evening train, lean and tanned. But he did not look like a man who had been off on a fishing frolic. He had noth-

ing to tell of his exploits or of his comradeships. To all my questions he returned brief answers as if speech was an effort. Yes, he had been very well. Yes, he understood that the fishing was good, but he had not fished. He had spent most of his time tramping. Mountain country, miles of forest, no roads, not even a trail to follow when you were far enough inside. He had been lost several times.

"It was like finding myself," he added, catching my eye merely in passing to his own next thought.

He wanted to know if I had ever experienced the strange animation there is in the silence of a deep wood. He supposed not, he added, no doubt referring to my timid domestic gender. It was confidential and personal, that silence. I told him I liked one shade tree, or maybe two, as much as anybody, but that nothing but trees depressed me, just as I should feel lonesome and diminished in a company of awfully great men and with no other ladies present.

Sometimes when I said a quick foolish feminine thing like this Peter would laugh. But now he did not even smile, and I perceived that he had not been listening. I began to regard my son with the attention you give a sick person when you do not know what ails him. Peter was not a poet nor a mystic. I never thought he was much of a philosopher,

though he was to my mind unfortunately erudite in the philosophies of other men. Therefore I thought it was queer that he had not fished and shared the life of the camp instead of musing round alone in the woods.

He leaned back in his chair, clasped his hands over his head and passed into a coma of silence. I went on talking of my visit to Maggie Fleming, giving him the news of Redwine Church—who had married, who had died and how many had been born again during the revival they held this year. Presently he interrupted me. He said he thought he would go up and try to get some sleep, as if the getting of sleep had become a difficult business. I noticed this because Peter has always been what you may call an enthusiastic sleeper.

An hour later when I went upstairs there was a line of light beneath the door of his room, and several times during the night I heard him stirring about. The next morning he was in his study when I came downstairs, though the early bird of him was not in the habit of showing up before breakfast. I supposed he was pressed for time to prepare his sermon for the following Sunday, as this would be prayer-meeting night. But he did not conduct this prayer meeting. Then it developed that he would not preach on Sunday. He had invited another minister to fill his appointment.

I do not know how it may be with other Christians,

but with me it has always been difficult to keep that assurance won in answer to prayer. It will pass from me when I need it most, and I am obliged to get down on my knees and pray for it again. So now the sense of security I had about Peter that day in the Redwine churchyard was gone. I began to be anxious about him again. His failure to preach meant something. I wanted to know if he had a sore throat. Many preachers suffer from this ailment. William frequently did, especially if he indulged too often in the singing of his favorite hymns. And he could never resist certain tunes like this one, which appealed to his shepherd spirit:

There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.

When he reached the line picturing the one sheep that had gone astray—Away on the mountains wild and bare—he invariably keened his voice to such a pitch of vocal anguish that I always had to make him gargle something for his throat when he came home.

But Peter declared irritably that nothing ailed him, implying that all he desired in the world was to be left alone, which is the state of a preacher who is not well off with his God.

He spent every day and the most of every night in his study. This study was no longer the orderly

place of a methodical student. It was a scene of the wildest confusion, as if the man in it had been searching for something he could not find. The books were disarranged on the shelves, piled on the floor, discarded in corners as if the hand that flung them there had disavowed them. Some of his favorite authors on the moral law had contributed volumes to this disheveled pile. But Kitto's Commentaries stood gray and undisturbed on the top shelf along with William's other books. I kept my eye on this study, finding in it the only news I had of my son. He was not doing any work that I could see with the naked eye, but one morning when I slipped in there for a moment while he was out I found a long page filled with references to texts and passages in the Scriptures.

I looked up a few of these and found that they had to do with prophecies, the Holy Spirit, and faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of men. Peter always seemed to sidestep the doctrine of his Lord's divinity in his sermons, which no preacher can do and see the fruits of the word in the lives of his people. I do not know what laws of rationalism must be violated in order to believe in the divinity of the Son of God, but I do know this is essential to believe. Maybe if I had acquired Peter's learning and had developed my logical faculties at the expense of my spiritual instincts, this would not have been so easy to believe. I reckon intellectual egotism has

kept many a smart man out of a prominent place in the kingdom of heaven.

I felt the old anguish of suspense as I withdrew softly from Peter's study that morning, as I used to feel it about William when he was in his wrestling-Jacob mood. And I experienced a strange sense of guilt toward Peter. If he had been more like his father, not so much my son, if he had not inherited from me some mettle of the spirit, more of this world than that other world, I should not have been so anxious. As it was I did not know what would happen. And when you do not know that, something you are not expecting at all usually happens before you can turn round and say, "Lord, have mercy!"

On the afternoon of this same day, which was Saturday, Mrs. Woodberry sent for me. She is a widow and a member of Peter's church. During the influenza epidemic of the previous winter she had lost her daughter, Arwin, a splendid young woman and her only child. She was one of those courageous, eminently sane women who can digest a sorrow like this and go on living without acquiring the habit of grief so depressing to other people. She had recognized the fact which we all discover, that there is a conspiracy among the living against the dead, to the end that these shall remain buried out of mind, and not exploited to win that royalty of sympathy which

those who are bereaved continually covet long after they cease to hope for it.

Months had passed now since I had heard Mrs. Woodberry mention Arwin. And I was the more astonished therefore to find her in a terrible state when I came in. She was upstairs in her bedroom, laid out of her own accord, as if she had just died of horror, but was still alive.

"What has happened?" I exclaimed.

"Read it," she whispered, making a faint gesture at something on the floor.

Then I saw a letter lying open with a bit of yellow paper folded in it.

I reached for it, put on my glasses and looked first at the signature. The name did not set well with me. It was signed "Isobel."

"Isobel?" I repeated, glancing at Mrs. Woodberry inquiringly, meaning "Which Isobel?"

"Sangster. She was in school with Arwin years ago," she explained faintly.

It was no more than a note saying with considerable affection that she, Isobel, had not had the courage to intrude upon dear Mrs. Woodberry's grief since poor Arwin's death until now, when she could offer her the immeasurable consolation of a message from Arwin, which she had herself received through the medium of automatic writing. She inclosed the message exactly as she had taken it.

"What foolishness is this?" I exclaimed indignantly.

"You have not read the message," she said.

The writing on the yellow paper was a clever forgery of Arwin Woodberry's own hand.

"Mother is not to worry," I read. "I am much better and very happy."

"How will she know this message is from you?"—in Isobel's own handwriting.

"She will find the papers she has been looking for on the shelf of the closet in my room," was the answer.

I folded the paper and stared at Mrs. Woodberry. Her lips were trembling, tears lay upon her cheeks.

"You do not understand!" she sobbed.

"No!" I admitted coldly.

"Those papers," she said; "no one knew of them but Arwin and myself. She had them. Since her death I have looked for them everywhere. To-day I found them on the shelf in that closet."

I have never doubted that there is such a thing as mind reading. Nobody can, who has a mind with the telepathic antennæ of their emotional natures sufficiently developed, any more than one is surprised to see a blind bug feel its way by the same method. But it is a bug. I thought Isobel Sangster was sinister enough to have practiced that sly degeneracy on this poor woman. In her subconscious mind—the door of which is always open to these spiritist

bugs!—Mrs. Woodberry had certainly canvassed the shelf in this closet along with every other possible place in the house where these papers could be found.

I tried to explain this to her.

"Yes," she answered, "I have thought of that. Some one has been sending me literature on psychic phenomena, and I have read Sir Ole Lost's books. One keeps going round in a circle trying to pierce the awful silence love leaves when it is gone."

She paused, her lips quivering.

"You cannot know how strong the temptation is—to—to believe a thing like that," she murmured, glancing at the yellow paper which I still held in the tips of my fingers.

"I should think Arwin would have communicated directly with you," I suggested indignantly.

You must not think I do not, with my reason, know all that," she answered. "But they tempt us, these people, when we are weakest. I would give anything, everything, my very life gladly to know that message really came—from Arwin," she sobbed.

"Not to believe, if it is true, is to deny her the immeasurable consolation of her thought still of me. They count on that, these spiritists. They take their prey from among the desolate like me!" she concluded.

I began to understand the outrage that had been committed upon this mother's defenseless heart. The

devil, dear brethren, is usually one of us, not so often a foreign prince of darkness as we suppose.

I said what I could to restore Mrs. Woodberry's mind on a proper Christian faith in immortality, and went home, because I did not know what to say to her. I was feeling a little queer and creepy up and down my own spine. It is a discomforting experience to be knocked out of your senses down into your aboriginal superstitions. You get a glimpse of where you came from.

I walked home, though it was some distance. Presently I knew I was coming to, as we say when somebody has a fit, because I began to feel my temper rising, which is always a good sign of the return of your normal relation to yourself.

I hope I am a Christian woman, though an honest person must have his respectful-to-God doubts at times about that, because every one of us must jerk a commandment out of place now and then in the mere business of living with his fellow man. And we may be obliged sometimes to turn the corner of a beatitude with considerable shrewdness, or subject an acquisitive neighbor to the temptation of taking an unchristian advantage of us. There have been moments when I have had at least a vision of holiness, but I have my suspicions of any man who can pass clean through his own and get into somebody else's spirit, until he can actually forge the handwriting of an immortal soul. When

it comes to spiritism I am a firm believer in the Monroe Doctrine. I am teetotally against all entangling alliances with the spirits of another world. I believe it is the most damaging and disintegrating illusion ever offered in exchange for a nobler faith. And though there may be such people, I have never known one single up-and-doing Christian who believed in spiritism. You must be a sort of latitudinarian in your faith and abnormally concerned for your own crazy comfort before you can accept this vagary as a personal experience. It is like getting your picture on a bottle of patent medicine with your testimonial beneath saying how it almost raised you from the dead and made you skip like a unicorn when you had been walking on crutches for years. Nobody believes you or buys the stuff except neurasthenics who might be as easily cured with peppermint water if it was so recommended.

Besides, if you believe in spiritism you must believe in immortality. And if you believe in immortality you must believe in a further state of existence beyond the grave. The only history we have of this state is the Bible, which has withstood longer than any other record the assaults of every kind of doubt. Now if one has passed out of his dust into this kingdom of spirits, his corruption has put on incorruption, he has been raised a spiritual body, and he is literally a native of that place. Therefore I should have my very grave doubts of any spirit with

whom I could possibly communicate. I should know that he had not qualified as a saint and citizen of that country, therefore not a proper spirit with whom to associate and take into my confidence.

No man can have faith who demands evidence. And for some reason which the Lord knows is good, it is faith, not evidence, that develops the spiritual attributes we need for eternal life. I reckon it is the wing practice of the spirit we get while we are still in the flesh. I would rather believe what I feel and cannot prove than accept the word of a new-fangled fortune teller about immortality, whose character in this world rarely shows enough units to qualify him for these communications he professes to receive from another world.

My notion is that probably we shall be very much engaged in psychical research in that world, where there will be a good deal of it to do before we get our records straight. But it is no legitimate occupation to carry on in this one. Maybe this is not the intelligent view to take, but it is safe, and I never cared much about being intelligent so long as I am in a position to fall on my knees and say, "Lord, I believe!" That is going a long sight further than the cerebral portion of your anatomy will ever take you. I never knew of any kind of eavesdropping that was not dishonorable, even if you did not hear anything. This is what psychical research is close kin to, eavesdropping the dead, and telling tales on them to their

living friends and relatives. If it is not the meanest kind of mischief it is bound to be the silliest sort of folly, and the most dangerous in this world, because if it is accepted in good faith it destroys real faith with fallacious evidence, which is not evidence at all, but superstition.

There is a silence that cannot be broken, like the distances between stars that cannot be passed. Let somebody find out the time of day on Mars, let him skeet out into space and bring back one single green leaf from the nearest planet. That should be easy compared to getting messages from immortal spirits. There may be some of us who have lived a long time according to the spirit rappings on our own conscience who will be tempted to risk a séance with Moses or Enoch or some prophet whom the Scriptures recommended.

As a Christian woman I have my prides, of which I have never been chastened. One of them is that I may be permitted to turn up my spiritual nose in Paradise at some old diminished philosopher, whose writings were beyond my comprehension in this present world. Another is that I may witness the severe operation by which these spiritists have a real sense of immortality grafted to their stunted faculties.

I was thinking along these lines, which is a sort of psychic way I have of spanking people whose way of thinking and acting does not agree with my temper, as I came home from this visit to Mrs.

Woodberry. And I was feeling calmer by the time I reached the door of my own house.

When I entered the hall Peter was ushering two men out of his study, politely, but with that finicky-ness of manner the best of men have when it is their duty to make some kind of moral distinction. One of these strangers was an elder person, tall, with a lean face and long musical-looking hair, the kind worn by band masters. The other was a short, stodgy man, young, but remarkably bald as to his head. He was dressed in the fashion of many men whom we see in the streets, but whom we never meet. He seemed to glow from his cravat to his spats.

I went upstairs to take off my bonnet and to change my shoes to a more peaceful pair of slippers. When I came down Peter had returned to his study. I paused before the closed door and considered whether I should go in. One cannot help being curious about strangers in her own house. And when my curiosity is aroused I may as well yield to it at once and avoid the struggle. So I opened the door and went in.

Peter stood before the window with his hands clasped behind him. He glanced back at me, meaning that I was interrupting him. But I sat down. A man always wants his mother even if he does not want her that minute. I frequently comfort myself

with this assurance when Peter indicates by a little movement, or by the whelping up of the frowns on his forehead, that he finds my presence a little trying.

"Who were your visitors, my son?" I asked amiably.

"Oh, I don't know, mother," he answered. "A couple of strolling rascals, most likely."

He came back and sat down before his desk, but I kept my eyes raised to him inquiringly.

"The younger one is a shoe salesman," he went on, "and claims to be a medium for the spiritists. The other is his manager. A medium must have a manager, you know!"

It never rains but it pours, I thought, recalling the scene I had just passed through with Mrs. Woodberry.

"What did they want?" I asked.

"They came to invite me to the meetings of the Society for Psychical Research," he answered. "There is one here, it seems," he went on. "They showed me a list of those who belong to it. You would be surprised. Practically all of them prominent people, men as well as women. Many of them members of my church."

I was not surprised. Sedative cults appeal to people of this class as certain drugs do to other people. It is simply a more enterprising and intellectually epicurean way of indulging a jaded appetite with

illusions, frequently by proxy and for the price they pay the accomplished medium. It is a more adventurous form of the old art of fortune telling. Your honest clodhopping mountaineer climbs his own mountain because he must. Upon the face of it lie his fields and his way up and down in the daily business of living. But it takes the tourist with no real ambition for achievement to climb the Matterhorn, a useless distinction. These spiritists are the same kind of tourists.

I was fumbling along with some such reflections as these when Peter glanced at me and said dully: "Some of the pastors of churches in this city are attending these spiritist séances."

I returned his glance accusingly. What I meant was that this was the rule with pastors now, to follow their people, not to lead them.

"They pointed out to me that a preacher who is not interested in psychic phenomena is behind the times," he went on.

"What did you say to that?" I asked.

"Nothing. I was showing them to the door when you came in," he answered. "The Gleate woman sent them," he added after a pause.

I experienced a pang of satisfaction at this definition of Isobel Sangster. I told him of the effort she was making to convert Mrs. Woodberry to spiritism, the monstrous trick she had played on her, and the condition I had found her in that afternoon.

Peter remained silent with his head bowed surlily. I retorted with the pressure of my own silence, hoping he would say something of what was in his mind. From time to time I offered a remark. I gave him my opinion of spiritism. Silence is a form of hysteria in men, as laughter and tears are with women. Peter was suffering from a fit of dumb hysterics. It was Saturday night. I had no reason to believe that he had made any preparation for his service the next day and I was anxious, lest another Sunday should pass with him out of his pulpit.

The clock struck six. He glanced up at it as if he said, "Thank you!" because he knows I never can remain seated where I am when the clock strikes six. I must always go out and perform some duty connected with this hour of the day.

I got up slowly and started reluctantly for the door. Dinner would be served presently, I told him. He replied that he did not care about it, that he was not hungry.

When a healthy man loses his appetite it is serious. I went back to my chair and sat down again.

"Peter," I began, "men and women are born credulous. It is the strongest instinct they have. They must believe something even if it is the cynic's stupid conviction that everything is wrong and mean and contemptible, or the rationalist's limited faith in just what he can prove like a little sum in figures. There is no such being as a man without faith. Every one

of them has an overwhelming passion for believing. But if they are not taught faith in God they will believe in something, however false or silly, because they must."

"Oh, mother," he exclaimed bitterly, "it is not this fad of spiritism that is troubling me. Their experiments are as childish as rubbing a black cat in the dark to see the electric sparks fly from the hair when you do not know what a natural thing electricity is. They are only rubbing one another's backs, stirring up the common animus of telepathy, combining it with imagination and calling it psychic phenomena!"

I was relieved by this answer. But if he was not disturbed about the advent of spiritism in his church, what else had happened, I wanted to know.

"Nothing has happened, mother," he answered, "it is myself that is giving me all the trouble. What do I believe? How much? Where do I stand in times like these as a minister? It requires courage to preach with the four winds of the world blowing against you!"

"The Lord give it to you, my son," I said and went out.

I dined alone that evening and retired early to bed, but not to sleep. I lay for a long time feeling like a wordless old prayer in the dark for my son.

At last I heard Peter come upstairs, then the click of the switch when he turned out the light in his room, which I had left on. Then the measured

tread of his feet for hours, back and forth across the floor.

I read something once about the "spiritual isolation of darkness." There is such a thing. As a rule you do your best deeds in the daytime. You make your reputation. You are somebody or nobody among men. But at night when the lights are out and you are alone, removed in consciousness even from resonance of all other human life, the sense you have of yourself is different. You meet the man you really are, face to face, in this mirror of darkness, no longer enhanced or diminished by the adjectives of other men's opinions. At the moment when you think you are about to fall asleep, the witness of your own spirit comes in, sits up with you and audits your accounts to the last secret deed and thought you have had in the wrong direction.

Then though you may be a good man or a great one, you discover that you are in a state of spiritual insolvency and you must have a bout with your wrestling angel until the dawn, to square things up and get the blessing you need. I reckon this was the sort of spiritual isolation through which Peter was passing that night. He was at last face to face with the God who calls men to preach the gospel, not to lecture on morals and the mere ethics of human conduct.

He showed the ravages of the struggle the next morning when he came down to breakfast. He was

pale and strangely calm. For the first time in my life I felt infinitely removed from him. He was different. I was late getting off to church that morning. When I arrived they were already singing the opening hymn, which was really a hymn with a hymn's tune, not an aria in the name of the Lord, one of Charles Wesley's:

Come, Thou, Almighty King,
Help us Thy name to sing.

I paused a moment outside the door to listen and wonder, because there was a roll and volume to the music with an old man's groaning bass and an old woman's high treble sticking about two notes above the tune. This was not the singing of any church choir, I concluded, and hurried in to see what was going on.

There was no choir, only the organist, Peter standing in the pulpit and the whole congregation singing. I had scarcely reached the place where I sit in this church before he said, "Let us pray!"

And now a queer thing happened. I have never been able to follow Peter when he leads in prayer, because he does it so well, with such studied smoothness of his purely earthly periods that my old hobbled spirit cannot keep up with him. But this was the halt, lame and blind prayer of a man who has cast aside the vanity of fine words, and I found myself stumbling along with him, a little shaken and tearful.

Peter took his Old Testament lesson from the first chapter of Habakkuk, which is a prayer for the revival of the Lord's work among his people.

There is a fire and a fleetness about the verbs of a prophet in a prayerful mood that surpasses the imagination of ordinary men.

"Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves," I heard Peter chanting in a voice that rose and fell like a mournful curse. "And their horsemen shall spread themselves and their horsemen shall come from far: they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat," he read, and it seemed to me I saw all the ruthless furies of our times riding down the souls of these people. "They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand."

I cannot tell how or why, but suddenly these Scriptures fitted the secret thoughts and fears of that congregation, though Peter did not stop to interpret them into the crueler violences of our own day. He turned immediately to the fourteenth chapter of John and read "portion" of it, as William used to say, and took the sixth verse as his text: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

In the old days I formed the habit of easing down after William took his text. I permitted myself to be mulled in the word, merely keeping my eyes open

and fixed on William for the sake of appearances. But Peter's preaching had never afforded me this somnambulent peace of the spirit. I always had to sit up on the pins and needles of my mind and listen to what he was saying, because it was never kin to me, and kept me disturbed. Now suddenly I realized that something strangely soothing and familiar was going on.

Peter was bending over the pulpit, speaking gently with a sort of tenderness not at all in his usual tones, but as you do to children who must be comforted. He was assuring them of something as if this was a matter of life, not death. To believe this settled everything, not that Jesus showed the way, but that he is the way, the truth and the life. To be encompassed in the security of his life, and his truth, was to know God.

If you are not a preacher you cannot preach nor give life to the word. So I cannot interpret that sermon. It was made of all the simple promises that men do not believe now. It offered those rewards men no longer crave to have. And yet this church was changed to a holy place. And there was in it the stillness of hearts that listen. Now and then a sentence fell from Peter's lips that echoed in my ears like the refrain of something heard years and years ago.

There was the usual congregation, people whom I had seen every Sunday for nearly a year, but did

not know. Now I recognized the faces of these strangers here and there as if they were the kindred of my heart, elder men and women who exchanged a glance as if they said "Amen!"

I took out my handkerchief and wiped the tears from my eyes. What was happening to me? This was Peter, not William, saying over the gifts of God to his people. Then suddenly I saw that Peter was like his father. Strange that I had never seen this resemblance before. The same expression, aloof and sad, the same bemused gesture of touching his brow. William used to do that! Now he was bringing the sermon to a close with a tender invocation that they should believe, and love one another and fear not. William used to do that! And now we were singing. "How firm a foundation—" That was his father's favorite hymn. The music of it rolled and billowed beneath the high nave of this church as if imprisoned souls had been released in these great words.

When the service was over I waited for Peter, who always came down to greet his people, receive their compliments and bow himself handsomely this way and that down the aisle to the door. But he did not come, and the people did not wait for him. They were going quietly away like men and women who have just prayed and are not ready to laugh. For a moment I stood alone in the nearly empty church.

Then I saw the half-open door behind the altar and knew that Peter had gone.

On Sunday afternoons I sometimes went to the attic and looked over William's sermons in the old tin box, not to read, having heard them so many times, but just to take them out and put them back again as you unfold and fold precious memories.

I went up there this Sunday afternoon. When I came to the top of the stairs I saw the lid of the box open, and one of the packages lying unfolded in the chair that I keep to sit in up there.

At the top of the page was written in faded script:

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

William's handwriting grew dimmer before the tears in my eyes. I remembered the Sabbath so many years ago when he preached this sermon for the first time. Peter had taken the lift of a sentence here and there from it to steady his desperate courage that morning. They were all marked as if he acknowledged a debt to be paid.

I was sitting in the parlor, feeling blessed and peaceful when he came in from his evening service.

There are wounds for those who triumph as well as for those who fail. And it is not wise to touch them when they are freshly made. So I said nothing to my son about what had happened that

day. Thus for a time there was silence between us. Then I caught Peter regarding me with a beam in his eye.

"So it was you, mother, who wrote the copy for the Good-News page? I might have known it," he said, smiling.

"But you did not even suspect it," I retorted, still nettled because I had not been suspected.

"The very good can rarely write so well about goodness," he offered. "I found the clippings of your Good News in father's old box of sermons," he explained. "Father had the sense of God, as other men have the sense of things," he went on after a pause. "I quoted from his sermon on the same text this morning."

"Yes," I answered gently.

"You recognized the passages?"

"No, not in the way you mean," I returned; "but I recognized the truth. It is always familiar."

"Mother, I may need those sermons now," he said, as if "now" was to be very different from the past.

"They are the legacy of a rich man, Peter," I answered, "but not like gold that can be squandered. The sermons in that box reach back far behind your father's day. In the very bottom you will find one preached by your great grandfather, who received one vote for the bishopric at the General Conference in 1870."

From that we went abroad in the years and I told him of this line of preachers from which he had sprung—the lives they had lived, the triumphs they had enjoyed, always poor in the world, always rich in God. It was the way I had of ordaining Peter and anointing his head with oil.

History is usually dull because it is a record of conditions, institutions and deeds, not of the lives of the people who achieved them. Very few men inhabit history, because historians are not interpreters of life but mere recorders of facts, the calendar keepers of civilization. And the reason why the characters portrayed in fiction are doubtful is because it requires a great man to interpret virtue, while any man with a fatal facility of expression can interpret vice. And the reason why it is easier to dramatize a scandal or a comedy is because Ichabod, instead of Isaiah, writes the lines and the monkey phrases for the actors and the comedians. Only a great artist can paint the epic scenes of our common life. Even then only great people with the eyes to see know what is in the picture. It is not that the people want to read about the littleness and meannesses of men, nor that they cannot appreciate the drama of what is good, but it is that they do not get it.

For all these reasons I also am unable to set down with the distinction it deserves the record of my son from this time. I am an old woman. I could never learn the art of writing, though I have tried.

The words I need grew up long ago in the Scriptures and in the best poetry. I cannot find them, nor put them together again, to fit this new life of my son. But if I could do it it would be something to tell—how he became plain, like the blessings we enjoy without thankfulness, and made himself of no reputation in a world where his honors and success had been assured. From this day he never enjoyed the fame of a popular preacher. His ministry drew him quickly out of sight of the rewards and judgments of men. But before the end of the year I saw with my own eyes a miracle wrought in this church.

Peter began to preach from the Scriptures, not from his own mind or the philosophies of other men. He preached with the earnestness of a man who believed in the word with a sort of anguish for the souls of men.

One day a reporter called after the service. He said he supposed Mr. Thompson knew that his preaching was attracting a great deal of attention in the city. Peter said "No." Well, it was quite sensational in fact, the reporter informed him, and would Mr. Thompson mind furnishing a copy of his morning discourse for the paper? Peter told him that he had no copy. He had got most of it from certain passages in the New Testament. What about an interview, then? He was sure Mr. Thompson's views on the problems of the times would be a good feature for the Sunday edition of his paper. But

Peter was not disposed to backbite his day and generation, and he told the young man that he was done with all problems save the eternal ones of repentance, faith and salvation. The answer sounded silly and insincere to that young man. He went away smiling at the joke.

I doubt if I could ever have been cured of a complaint by a woman doctor, however skillful she might be in the practice of her profession. And I am certain I could never have been converted under the ministry of a woman preacher even if she spoke with the tongue of men and of angels. I should know them both too well. They could not command my confidence or my imagination, which is essential. I should know that this doctor had a back that was sister to my back, that it ached morbidly at times, and she could not stop it from aching until it cleared up of its own accord! Therefore she need not give herself airs about my back and offer to cure it with a pill, because there would be no illusions between us upon which to base the efficacy of that pill. Whereas if your physician is a man you may deceive him about what is really the trouble, and he can also deceive you into thinking he is deceived. You relax accordingly and his nostrums revive you.

By the same token, a feminine-gendered evangelist could never by the most wrathful and searching preaching convict me of my sins, even if I was dead in them and knew it. In the first place, her voice

would be too thin. You cannot awaken a trespasser to repentance in the high treble tones of "Curfew shall not ring to-night!" All the prophets had thunderous voices. You can tell that by the kind of language they used. And no woman could think or rumble such curses. Also, however assured her ministry might be, I should know that her faith was just a woman's faith after all, born on its knees, and liable to stay there. Very few women will ever enter the gates of Paradise carrying Hosanna banners; they will come meekly, with tears in their eyes, and a moving tale of suffering and sacrifice on their lips. I know all that, being a woman myself. And I am bound to confess I should feel safer if my salvation were led through this vale of tears by the regular bifurcated priests of the Lord, who do not know these things or who concede them to us as a part of our religious nature. This is only a notion, of course, and I do not recommend it to other women, but I am just telling the truth about how I feel. It is my nature, and I believe it is the natural nature of most women to feel most comfortable when under the safe conviction of the superiority of the man or mankind nearest her in life, except of course in the mere matter of her more delicate feminine virtues and the censored language she uses. I always felt happily and immeasurably inferior to William, though I had streaks of alien light in my mind very helpful and

illuminating to his feet in the straighter path through the wilderness of this world.

In my relation to Peter, however, during these ten years of his ministry I had missed this comfort. I suffered much from the depression of being somewhere far beyond him in the spirit. It was not that I was his mother, nor yet the difference which years and experience make. And it troubled me to have a profounder spiritual sense of life than he had, standing in his pulpit preaching the Lord's word. Now, quite suddenly our relations were changed and I experienced the ineffable satisfaction of being properly in the rear of my son, a peaceful meekness all women have toward a true priest. I went about my duties with this blessed feeling. And Peter went about doing his pastoral visiting in a new siprit.

He was away the whole of every afternoon and I supposed he was visiting the poor, which is what a good man usually does when his vision clears. And I should not have suspected the new kind of poor he was visiting if Mrs. Buckhart had not come in one day. She said Brother Thompson was certainly stirring things up in his church. I said, yes, the congregation was mending, that every seat was filled now at every service. She said that was not what she meant at all, and I asked what she did mean then, seeing that she had a smile in her eye which did not look pious to me.

She told me that Peter was after the stewards in

his own church; she said it was out all over town.

I was alarmed. Sometimes a closer walk with God tempts a preacher to discipline members of his church for transgressions with which they have been permanently endowed, and of which they will no more repent than they will of the few remaining hairs on their head. I did hope Peter would not develop this harsh kind of piety.

Mrs. Buckhart read my anxiety and said, "Oh, I don't mean that he is doing anything radical. But he is sitting up with Cathcart and Mixon and Wayland, every one of his stewards, for all I know," she exclaimed, laughing.

"But what for?" I asked.

He wants them to repent of their sins, seek forgiveness, become Christian men," she answered. "Mr. Cathcart is very much upset," she went on. "It seems that Brother Thompson told him that he was only a rich man, a prominent citizen and a steward in the church, but that the fruits of the Spirit were not in him!"

She threw up her hands and shrieked with laughter.

"Did you ever hear of such a thing! It is done not in polite Christian circles," she exclaimed.

"What—what are the charges against Mr. Cathcart?" I stammered, remembering a dark circumstance earlier in the year, and believing sleeping

scandals as well as sleeping dogs should not be disturbed.

"That is what Cathcart wants to know," she returned. "Mr. Wayland was present. He told me what happened. He had made exceedingly short shift for himself it seems. He said Brother Thompson was in Cathcart's office, talking to him about repenting and—and—well, you know, really getting down to the business of letting his light shine as a Christian, as it does now as a railway magnet. What fault did Brother Thompson find in him, he wanted to know. Didn't he give his goods to feed the poor? Yes. Didn't he support the church? Yes. And attend to his duties as a steward? The material ones, yes. Wasn't he a decent man in his walk and conversation? Yes. Well, then, why had Brother Thompson hopped on him, with forty dozen outdoing sinners in his church that really needed jacking up? And what else did Brother Thompson want him to do—resign his stewardship? No, certainly not. He wanted Cathcart to go down on his knees and pray the Lord to renew a right spirit within him. He said Cathcart's mind and spirit were centered on the things of this world and that was what was the matter with him. Which is the truth about all of us," she concluded.

"Mr. Wayland said he did not mind the way Brother Thompson talked to him," Mrs. Buckhart went on, "but Cathcart was all broken up. He had

gone to see the presiding elder about it. And I heard that the elder saw Brother Thompson. Nobody knows what happened between them, but it had no effect, because Brother Thompson had a meeting of the stewards last night after prayer meeting, and he gave them—well, you know Wayland, a nice fellow, but not very refined—he said Brother Thompson gave them the 'once-over,' and that he prayed one of the most scarifying prayers he ever heard in their behalf."

She said that though she regarded Brother Thompson as a fine preacher she had always thought of him as easygoing, spiritually speaking, and that she was surprised at the new development in his ministry and she did hope he would not carry it too far.

"Well, I hope he won't become an evangelist, that sort of thing," she answered. "He has been so well received by the best people. I heard one of the members of his church say he had the elegance of brains. She said his sermons were the finest tapestries of thought. He is popular with people who have some appreciation of talent. He is one of the few preachers we have who could fill acceptably the pulpit of a cosmopolitan church."

I listened, and thought how far removed now Peter was from this worldly praise of his ministry.

"You know it is one thing to be a popular preacher and quite another thing to be a popular revivalist. I cannot imgaine Brother Thompson drawing a crowd

like that. People whose religion begins by such a shocking exposure of their emotions to the harsh weather of the gospel! Shouting and going on, Ugh!" she concluded with an expressive shrug.

I regarded her thoughtfully, wondering why she liked me for I had never liked her or her charities, and least of all her advice. And though she was no longer a member of the church Peter served she would drive nine miles to give it. I reckon I have suffered more advice from incompetent people than any other woman alive unless she has spent nearly forty years in the Methodist itinerancy.

"And you know it will ruin him in the Conference," she said, rising to go, as she always did when she uttered a depressing prophecy.

It was her way of leaving her dead to bury themselves.

"The Conference did not call Peter to preach the gospel," I answered, rising to get her parasol, which she always tries to leave behind my parlor door, that she may come back for it and say something else about Peter which she has not the courage to say to him.

"No, but the Conference can send him back to the little towns and circuits to preach where the people have their regular August fits of religion," she returned grimly, as she went out. And she hoped I didn't mind her speaking so plainly since she was

interested in Brother Thompson and did not want to see him make a mistake.

I told her, no, I did not mind in the least—and allowed the screen door to bang behind her as harshly as it would slam.

Then I went back and sat down in the dust of my hopes for Peter. I had yielded long ago any taste I had for the pomp and circumstances of this present world, but it was not so easy to think of Peter stripped of his fine reputation as a popular city preacher, sent back to live the life his father had lived in the itinerancy. Moses and that other cloud of witnesses are not the only miracles of the same kind. We are all subject now and then to a fog of memories out of which appear and disappear the faces of just men made perfect through sacrifices that lasted for years and were not merely the burnt offering of a good deed here and there. It is a vision of William I have at such times, and never in a cloud of glory surrounded by the long-bearded Major prophets, but I see him an obscure preacher of the word traveling down the years, growing old and bent beneath the burden of souls and his own prayers, his fame barely reaching from one circuit to the next one. The church is founded upon the faith and sacrifices of these dead and forgotten men of God. No one knows to whom Paul addressed some of his greatest epistles, like those to the Romans. I reckon he sent them to the "preacher in charge," who preserved them, but

whose own name does not appear in the Scriptures. Many a time I have comforted myself with reflections like these about William.

But one's son is different. When I considered Mrs. Buckhart's prophecies about Peter I could not endure so much meekness. I was not willing to see him pass out among the inglorious faithful saints as his father had done. I cast about for some other happier future for him. And I reckon for the first time in my life I pinched off a little of William's halo with a diminishing thought. It might be after all, I reflected, that William lacked some quality of mind or nature essential to a great preacher, which Peter, my son, did have. The church must recognize this quality in him, and he must therefore continue to be a preacher of great power and influence. He was better equipped than his father for detecting and combating the shrewd fallacies of our times, and so on and so forth. Then I caught myself sitting with closed eyes praying for the bishops and elders of our church, which is a thing I never did before, because in William's day they were the thorns in my side, and I did not care particularly about commending them to the attention of my Heavenly Father.

But now I prayed that they might be enabled to recognize the worth and quality of my son, and that they would continue to reward him with the best appointments. A mother will do such

things. The Lord in his kindness only knows how unscrupulous and grasping she can be for her children. If her son is blind, or dead in his trespasses and sins, she will pray for his redemption, but once she is sure of his salvation she whirls right in and prays with equal fervor for the success of his fortunes in this present world. I must say this prayer yielded me some comfort and a stronger faith in the governing powers of our church. It may be if I had prayed oftener for our bishops I should have bad more confidence in their wisdom, but it is very hard to believe fearlessly in the distinterested wisdom of an autocrat.

Early in the spring of this year Peter conducted the usual series of meetings in his church. But now about the middle of October he announced one Sunday morning that there would be services there every evening until further notice. He invited all sinners, and those who desired a closer walk with God to attend. The implication was that neither the saints nor the public were wanted.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Cathcart called. He came to tell Peter that he would handle the press end of the revival and would insure him all the publicity he needed. He had already engaged a reporter, he said, to take stenographic reports of his sermons. He told Peter that he really wanted to do all he

could to help and he hoped Peter would feel free to call on him.

"For anything, Thompson, but to lead in prayer! I can't do that!" he exclaimed.

"All right," Peter answered, "I won't ask you to lead in prayer. I never have, because I do not think you are fit, Brother Cathcart. A lot of our members do not believe you are a Christian man."

"Now don't start that again, Thompson," he exclaimed. "I'm beginning to believe a little in my forbearance at least or I'd never take the—er—drubbings you have been giving me of late!"

"But I shall take you at your word and call on you for what you can do," Peter went on. "And there is something you can do that will be of great assistance."

"What is it?" Cathcart asked with the cordial look of a little boy who wants to win favor. He really was a good man, I believe, a better Christian than Peter thought he was, seeing that he suffered all the time the mortal temptation of being president of a big corporation.

"I want you to disengage that reporter at once," Peter informed him.

"Oh, very well," Cathcart returned, taken aback.

"You know the editors of our three daily papers personally, don't you?" Peter went on.

"Oh, yes, I do a lot of business with them, advertising, you know," Cathcart answered.

"Well, I am going to ask you to use your influence to make sure that no mention whatever of these meetings appears in the papers," Peter informed him.

Cathcart wanted to argue this point. He thought at least the papers should carry an announcement. He said it was customary, and how would the people know of these services?

"If I can preach with the right authority, if I can make only a few believe, that church will be filled. We do not want publicity. We want some personal private repentance. There is no such thing as the power of the press unto salvation. It is the power of God we need. The church has suffered more than anything else from exploitation, experiments and advertising. This meeting is going to be a private affair, between the Lord and just us. The people who attend these services shall be made to feel this sanctity in our church and nothing that goes on there shall be exposed to the world," Peter concluded.

Cathcart was impressed. He said it was a novel idea and it might work. My impression is that he thought this might be a shrewder, more enticing form of advertising.

Peter preached that night from the eighteenth chapter and fourth verse of Ezekiel: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

It was what I call a powerful sermon. He claimed

these people, and all people in his Lord's name. He was like a man seeking in the rubbish and confusion of the world for that which belonged to his Father. He brushed away the world and its problems and laid hold of what always remained, the imperishable spirit of man.

But it was not until he came to the last clause of his text, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," that a change came over this congregation. This church was filled with a fierce wind which came blowing on us from down the ages. Peter's very words seemed to smoke. The heat of damnation doctrines singed our very ears. I glanced about hurriedly in this storm of denunciation and saw the pale faces of the people. No man looked at his neighbor. Cathcart and Wayland were sitting together on the front bench like targets. "And Peter was not missing a single shot.

I am as willing as anybody to be convicted of my sins. I am used to it, and am not so much cast down on account of the practice I have had in repentance, but I felt queer, as if we were all being drawn forcibly back in time when the doctrine of damnation was still a hot doctrine, and Hades a very real place of fire and brimstone. It seemed to me every minute Peter would go as far as that. But he kept clear by a margin so narrow that you could almost smell the inward torment of souls. He was using strong, old-fashioned words and there was an

aged majesty in his sentences, like old prophets marching out to throw dust over their heads and pray for their straying people.

Presently it dawned on me what was happening. Peter was preaching to this modern city congregation his great-grandfather's sermon on The Soul that Sinneth! It was a naked picture of the Promethean tragedy of evil, such as the imagination of elder preachers produced.

I leaned back and felt easier. But no one else did. Whatever happened later he had certainly awakened the consciences of those present.

For nearly a week he preached from the bottom of that old box of sermons. And after the third night the church could not hold the crowds that came to hear him. Then one evening he invited penitents to the altar for prayers.

This was the test. It is not so difficult for plain, honest-to-goodness men and women to admit that they are sinners, but this was a church filled with fashionable folk, and people of this sort are no more inclined to take a penitential rôle at the altar of the church they attend than they are to spring upon the stage and take part in the play at the theater they attend. The stuff must be brought to them, sitting, whatever it is, whether amusement or salvation. So I thought Peter was taking a terrible risk when he invited them to confess their sinfulness by coming up

for prayers. I was so nervous I could not sing, Just as I Am, which I have sung a thousand times. I held my hymn book open and watched the congregation. It was like watching a fine house built on the sand. I could see it swaying a little, about to crack and crumble. Then poor old Brother Cathcart sneaked out from near the front and knelt at the altar. The breach had been made. In a moment the aisles were crowded with men and women, some coming timidly, doubtful, as if they had never done this before and did not know how it would look, others walking boldly as if they used to do it, and knew how, and were glad of the chance to be decent and honest about their transgressions.

In the old days we always had helpers round the altar, seasonable Christians who talked to the penitents. So, now, after many years I walked again among these kneeling sinners as I used to do in the little backwoods churches on William's circuits, telling them how to pray, how easy it is to believe in God if they would renounce the world; the same old promises, the words of comfort I used to say.

There was a very small gray seismic disturbance at one end of the altar with Peter bending above it. I thought I had seen Brother Cathcart kneel there. Then I saw Peter step over the altar rail and start down the aisle toward the rear of the church. Presently he returned with a very red-faced man, who

stood and glared down at these penitents as if he doubted something he had heard. Then Peter plucked Cathcart out of the midst of them, looking disheveled and as if he was about to be drowned with every thread on him dry. The red-faced man glared at him. Cathcart made a face at him, which may have been the cramps of repentance in his countenance. They retired to the amen corner and had some words. Then they both came back and knelt at the altar. The red-faced man was the foreman of Cathcart's railway shops. Peter told me afterward that at last he had found out how to avert a strike.

Incidents like this happened now every day, as they always do in real revivals. Enemies forgave each other. Labor knelt with capital, and there was no trouble in inducing both of them to acknowledge their faults and make amends and concessions.

I reckon the reason why the people acted so freely according to their feelings was because nothing was published about these services. That church became a household. Never was so much sensational copy wasted in this city. And Peter even took one of the editors of our morning paper into the church at the close of the meeting along with three hundred other converts. This man said he had already made up his mind to quit the newspaper business anyhow. I do not know what he meant by saying that.

It was while these meetings were in progress that

Peter came home one evening and asked me if I noticed "that girl."

"Which girl?" I asked.

He did not know her name. He had never seen her there before, but he had noticed her particularly because she was different.

"How do you mean, different?" I asked.

"I do not know," he answered.

"Did she come up for prayers?" I asked.

"No, she has been converted. I am sure of that," was the astounding answer.

"How can you be sure?"

"By her face. It is a little verse of goodness with a short upper lip and a turned-up nose," he laughed.

The next night I kept on my long-distance glasses and looked for this girl, but I could not find her by the description Peter had given.

He wanted to know again if I had recognized her. "She was sitting in the fifth row from the front in the middle aisle," he said. "She has dark hair and she is very fair. Her eyes must be blue, but they are dark."

"What was the color of her dress?" I asked.

He had not noticed that.

"Did she wear a large hat?"

He was confused. He had not noticed what kind of hat she wore.

"Young?"

She had the youth of innocence; that was all he knew about her age.

I considered this matter. Peter was in love with a girl whom he did not know, whose foot he had not seen, which is the wildest risk a man can take in love. I have heard him comment oftener on the feet of women whom he knew than upon their faces, characters or brains. I always thought Isobel Sangster's feet, which were very small and pretty, had something to do with his unfortunate infatuation.

The next day as luck would have it—if it was not the girl herself behind it—Mrs. Woodberry called me on the phone. She said her niece, Reba Woodberry, was visiting her and she wanted us to come over for tea.

Peter declared that he did not have the time, but since I had accepted the invitation he would go if only for a few minutes.

The first thing I saw when we entered the Woodberry parlor was a tall, pretty girl with a verse-of-goodness face. The next thing I saw was my son flushing as red as a schoolboy when Mrs. Woodberry presented her niece.

I do not know how they managed it, but when our heads were turned for a moment Peter and Reba disappeared. We could hear them talking in the library across the hall.

"They are in love," Mrs. Woodberry said simply.

"In love!" I repeated, not as a question, but a sentence which I pronounced against Peter's mother.

"Yes. She is very much interested in him. You know how transparent girls are. She would have me ask you this afternoon. She was determined to meet him, to hear him talk to her, not a whole congregation!" she laughed.

This was the beginning of Peter's courtship. And it was a courtship practically without interruptions to the end. What time he was not attending to his pastoral duties he spent with Reba Woodberry, or mooning about the house waiting for a seasonable hour to call on her. Men are strangely adjustable. Here was Peter, but recently come to a sense of himself as a priest of God, engaged with all the fervor of his spirit upon the apocrypha of himself, which is what every lover is, an eloquent exaggeration that bears only the faintest resemblance to the man he is or to the husband he will become. He was exalted as by a great sorrow, and he was humble beyond any previous knowledge I had of him. It seemed that he had only a despairing hope of winning Reba's love. I have noticed this about men—a bad one or a cheap fellow is always presumptuously sure of his success in a romantic affair, but a good one rarely ever is. Love seems to knock the very tail feathers out of his masculine conceit. He works up a prevaricating sense of unworthiness with an eloquence

and sincerity that have tried the patience of many a waiting woman. So it was that Peter went on villifying himself to Reba Woodberry and suffering his self-imposed fears when it was perfectly apparent to me that she was only awaiting an opportunity to accept him.

She may have been in love with Peter, I do not know if she was or not, but she certainly was in love with the preacher Peter.

It is conceded the world over that the most attractive man to women is a soldier, but the concession is made by a world not so intimately associated as I have been with preachers. I have never known one, married or single, young, old or damnably ugly who failed quite unconsciously to stir the prayer signals of a sort of spiritual romanticism in more feminine hearts than he was in a position to satisfy without a breach of prudence or morals. I reckon it is because they see him in the pulpit, while they only see the soldier in his uniform. But every Sabbath day they behold their pastor, clothed in the long sadcoat tails of his order, uttering the noblest thoughts and scaling the very walls of heaven with his prayers and eloquence.

Now since Peter was by no means ignorant or entirely innocent in regard to the romantic inklings he had excited in every church he had served, I nearly lost my patience with his diffidence in this his first really serious affair, before he came in one evening

smiling like a blessed lamb of God and informed me that Reba Woodberry had promised to be his wife.

I said the right things. Reba was a nice girl. She would make him a good wife. I entirely approved of his choice, and I hoped they would be happy. But I could not help feeling sad for myself, wondering a little about what would become of me now, in spite of the fact that he assured me tenderly that we would all live happily together ever after. Two can do it, but I doubt if three can.

I went to my room that night feeling like the last withered leaf on a naked bough with a cold wind rising. I noticed particularly how stiff my knees were when I knelt to pray that the Lord would bless my son and make him a good husband, and cause his face to shine as this girl who had promised to be his wife. But when I tried to think of a prayer for myself, tears came instead. I could only think of William and wish for the old days we had spent together.

When there is nothing else you can do for yourself it is a great relief to weep, and I must have let go a bit because presently I heard Peter tap on the door.

"Mother!" he called.

"Yes, Peter," I answered, making haste to get in bed.

"Are you all right?" he wanted to know.

"Yes," I answered.

"I thought I heard you——" he began.

"You did," I interrupted quickly; "you heard me sneeze. I am catching cold."

"May I come in?"

"No, Peter! Go to bed," I answered in my maternal voice, which was normally irritable.

There was a silence, then: "Mother!" he called again in softer tones.

"Yes, my son."

"You are the best mother in the world," he announced.

I was in the mood to feel that this was highly probable, but I had the grace to remain silent.

"And no woman can take your place in my heart," he added.

"I know it, Peter. Now go to bed. You will catch your death in that cold hall."

"Good night, mother!"

"Good night, Peter!" I returned, wondering how large a place that was reserved for me in his heart.

I did not rest that night and I did not feel very well the next morning—not ill, but I had a sort of depressed superannuated feeling round the heart.

Jealousy is a queer thing. You may think you are free from it, but you never are. It is the possessive case of all human nature. We cannot escape it, especially when we are about to lose something which always belonged only to us. I was honestly glad Peter had chosen a wife. I was willing that he should love and cherish her. What hurt me like

the sharpest pain was the fact that I could no longer do the things I had always done for him. I could not put his clothes away or get them out again for him, or mend his things or plan the dishes he particularly liked, because his wife would do these things. I was about to become a highly cherished relic in my son's house! I might as well be a portrait of myself hanging on the wall!

Nevertheless, I went to call on Reba Woodberry in the afternoon, as was my duty. This was a sort of ceremony. Mrs. Woodberry was also present and we only got through the polite speeches of a prospective foreign relationship. Reba was glowingly pretty and far too happy to notice my sadness which I tried to conceal.

The next afternoon I was sitting in the corner beside the fire in the parlor with my mending basket and I was trying to thread a needle, which of late years always reminds me of that camel mentioned in the same connection somewhere in the Scriptures, it is so hard to do. I was still intent upon this task when the door opened. I did not look up because the thread seemed to be feeling its way more intelligently toward the eye, and I thought it was Peter coming in.

Then I heard the swish of a skirt. The thread shot past but not into the needle, and I looked up, to see Reba Woodberry standing a little wistfully just inside the door, flushed, smiling, but with her hand

behind her still clasping the knob, not entirely sure of the situation.

My hands flew apart, the thread between the fingers of one and the needle between those of the other.

Before I could move or speak a word of welcome she flew across the room, kissed me and exclaimed, "let me do that!" in a tone which implied that it was a perfect outrage for a woman of my age to be obliged to thread her own needles.

She dropped on the stool at my feet, cocked her pretty head to one side and performed this service.

I am a hypocrite! I suppose one must be in dealing with another woman. It is a part of our mutual gender. I felt my chin quiver and the tears spring in my eyes.

"My dear, Peter would never have thought of doing such a thing for me," I quavered.

"You really do need a daughter, you precious darling!" she exclaimed, regarding me tenderly.

I was not able to control my feelings for a moment. My mind went back through the years as we go sometimes seeking a lost memory. When had any one called me "precious," and who ever had had the temerity to call me "darling"? I had always been plain "mother" to Peter or "Dear Mother," if it was a letter he sent. I had been just "Mary" to William, or "Dear Wife" if it was a letter. Clearly I had missed something out of my whole life, the touch of a hand like this soft white one resting upon my

knee, the look of eyes like these lifted to mine, blue and sweet, and a girl's voice to call me gentle names.

"Yes," I answered tremulously, "at my age a daughter will be very comforting. I have often thought if Peter had been a girl he would know when I am not feeling well. As it is he never does unless I tell him."

She was moved to bestow more caresses, which weakened me to further larger tears, all the time being conscious of my deep duplicity, knowing how hard it was going to be to yield Peter to her care, but at the same time experiencing a maudlin satisfaction in her ministrations.

We had some talk after this. I told her how good it was of her to marry Peter. He needed a wife. She said she was proud to be chosen, and that she regarded my son as a great man.

"Peter does very well," I answered dryly. There was no need to raise false hopes about his perfections. Lovers have them, but husbands do not.

"He has promised to make me happy," she answered, probably in rebuttal.

"Well, he won't," I returned.

"Why?"

"Because no man ever did or can make a woman happy. They only make us patient and long-suffering and, maybe, good," I answered.

The weather of her countenance changed. The

bright skies of her eyes darkened at me, you understand, not Peter.

"He will do the best he knows," I went on ruthlessly. "He will remember for a long time to help you up and down the steps. He will pick up your handkerchief if you drop it, because he has been taught to do these things. And he will kiss you when he goes out in the morning if you train him to do it. But he won't if you don't. Men are children. You can never let up on them."

She said she supposed so, but in a tone which implied that she did not believe a word I was saying.

"You realize, my dear, what a serious thing you are doing when you marry a Methodist preacher?" I began again.

She hoped she did.

"It is not like marrying an ordinary man," I told her.

"Oh, no, of course not."

"You enter a difficult family, the church, not as a member, but as the daughter-in-law of the congregation, so to speak. You surrender many pleasures and companionships. Peter will be your only worldly amusement, and he cannot be worldly at all," I warned her.

She threw back her head and keened a laugh, shrill and merry, at this definition of Peter. Then suddenly she grew serious. There was the shadow of a fear in her eyes.

"It will not be so terrible, all that, with Peter to love me?" she asked.

I regarded her for a moment in silence. I saw my own youth sitting there untried by the griefs and hardships of the years I had known. And suddenly I remembered the yield of these years: A good conscience; peace; all the memories of William; my son. What immeasurable rewards had been mine!

"No, my dear," I answered, drawing her close to my knees. "You will have your cares and your burdens. Every woman does. But you will always have honor and respect. You will move in the best society. You have chosen a great career. I haven't a doubt, Reba"—laughing at my own thought—"that they who were the wives of preachers in this world will be the leaders of the highest society in heaven! They will know so much about the manners and customs of that place by faith!"

Just then Peter came in. Reba sprang to her feet, and we all laughed together and love abounded.

Still I felt like the shadow of many years on this bright horizon, and it occurred to me that I would spend most of the following summer with Maggie Fleming in the Redwine circuit.

In November the Annual Conference of our church met as usual. I was very anxious about Peter. He was beloved by his people and we heard that they had sent a strong petition asking that he should be returned to them. But I have known such

petitions to fall like seed in stony ground, meaning no reflection on the heart of the bishop or his cabinet. Reba was also anxious, chiefly, I think, because she wanted a church wedding and to be married in Peter's church. She had no conception of the significance that must be attached to Peter's appointment this year nor that the fate of her husband's whole future in the ministry would depend upon it.

At last the news came in a wire from Peter to Reba. He had been returned to this church! I reckon for the first time in my life I really forgave the episcopacy and the elders for not appreciating William according to his true worth.

Peter and Reba were married the following April. They went away on their honeymoon and I went up to spend a long time with Maggie Fleming.

The spring flowers were blooming on William's grave, not those I had planted, but fair young maiden blossoms from seed blown there by the summer wind, very small and white, close to the sod, as if it would never do to make too great a display of themselves upon the grave of such a man as this.

How different the whole of life has been from the hopes and plans I had. Sometimes, sitting here in the late afternoon of my days, I wish for some great worldly woman who had her way and her happiness with whom to exchange experiences. I have a curiosity to know how such a woman thinks and feels when

the shadows gather behind her and the pale stars of immortal countries begin to shine in the sunset skies. Is there such a thing as happiness? Would she know? Or is this the only real thing, faith in God?

(THE END)

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